The Ground and Content of Christian Hope

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Contents

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

'The Ground and Content of Christian Hope'

This thesis is an attempt to develop a constructive systematic argument about Christian hope. The first chapter examines the historical ground of Christian hope in Jesus' death and resurrection, the central instance and paradigm of God's saving action. Precisely because it is hope in God who raised Jesus from the dead, Christian hope can face fully those features of life which deny hope and still believe rationally that God's purposes of life and love will triumph. This is shown by discussing hope in terms of atonement and suffering. In chapter two we explore further the historical and theological ground of hope by pressing the importance of understanding Jesus' resurrection as an historical event, and by discussing the trinitarian theology of death and resurrection. We suggest that the theology of Holy Saturday is particularly important since it is an attempt to take seriously Jesus' death as an event within the very life of God. Death itself is an important subject for Christian theology. Christian hope must help people to find positive significance in their mortality as well as trusting in life after death. Moreover, the theological significance of Jesus' resurrection extends far beyond its implications for human destiny since it invites a re-thinking of God, human being and the world. In particular, it points us to Jesus as God's way of saving the world, and shows the importance of self-sacrifice if hope is to be kept alive. The complex of crucifixion-resurrection is the ground, logic and pattern for the actions of Christian hope. Nevertheless the hope for life after death is essential to Christian hope since it is the hope for the final fulfilment of God's purposes not only for us but for all creation. This shows that eschatology should not be fanciful speculation but rather cautious projection from our present experience of God. We sketch out a possible Christian eschatology in terms of the importance of the body, the social nature of personal life, and the abiding place of creation itself. In chapter three we examine the pressure of the logic of the Christian doctrine of God - ie of the triumph of his grace in crucifixion and resurrection - towards universalism, and find this compelling despite the familiar objections. If all men and women are to love God freely we must think of personal growth towards perfection beyond death. Finally, in chapter four, we turn to the practice of hope in seeking a better human future. We argue that this makes politics an important and unavoidable concern for Christians, and we show why Christian belief requires us to

take politics seriously, despite the claims often made, both inside and outside the church, to the contrary. Some indication is given of how the complex relation between faith and politics can be respected, and we make specific proposals for the kind of changes which Christian hope should cause us to work for in contemporary Britain. Thus it may be seen that Christian hope embraces the whole of life in the conviction that all things work together for good under God's love.

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By Way of Explanation and Introduction

Hope is an essential feature of what it is to be human, so much so that 'if hope were totally extinguished and there remained only a black despair, it would be impossible to go on living' (Macquarrie, 1982:243, cf 1978a:1-30). In itself, therefore, the fact that human life is characterised by hope is a very interesting subject and can be approached from various disciplines (see eg Des Roche, 1979). Our approach is explicitly theological and Christian: we want to know what hope the Christian faith can bring to the world, or perhaps better, find in the world, because in fact Christian faith finds hope in a most surprising way in a very unpromising context.

The need for hope in the world today hardly needs to be stated. Great challenges face us both in our own national life (unemployment, poverty, social disorder) and on a worldwide scale (the North-South divide, the threat of nuclear holocaust). At the same time as such problems require us to call upon our deepest resources of hope, they also make hope very difficult. Hope is undoubtedly under great pressure at the current time. It is not at all obvious that hope can be justified and yet without hope our situation can only get worse. In such a situation Christian faith would be of little value if it could not face squarely those things which count against hope and yet give us reasons and strength to live and act in hope. This needs to be taken seriously by theology as an indication of one of its most important tasks today.

It is immediately encouraging to note that Christian faith is characterised by hope. Contemporary theology has made much of this and so we have witnessed the phenomenon of 'the theology of hope'. Despite a considerable proliferation of literature we must express a certain dissatisfaction with the theology or theologies of hope. In the first place, they have been too narrowly activist. In the light of our opening paragraphs we must agree that the primary task is to make a better human future, but this is not simply a matter of politics, nor is it the whole matter of Christian hope. In the second place, and rather ironically given the first comment, it seems that too much of this writing has been rather abstractly political. It has talked much of hope for the future but has engaged the concrete political problems which must be tackled if this future is to be possible with much less enthusiasm or application. Third, it has not engaged the central doctrinal substance of Christian faith with sufficient persistence and rigour. In this respect it has not lived up to the example of Moltmann's Theology of Hope and The Crucified God

(especially this) which have been the inspiration of so much of the theology of hope.

The importance of the theme of hope, and yet its under-developed doctrinal treatment in contemporary theology, combine to provide the opportunity and challenge of doing some systematic theological work on the subject. The word 'systematic' is not used here in the sense of a closed and complete system which is deduced logically from certain principles. The subject matter of Christian theology does not allow this degree of success and neatness, not least in the theology of death and resurrection which forms the core of the argument of this thesis. Our work is systematic in the following respects. First, it is an attempt to discover the ground of hope. Second, it tries to unfold the logic of hope so that 'the way the argument works' is clear. Third, we do this by drawing upon the doctrinal substance of Christian faith in order to see what this says about hope. In other words, through the question of hope we are seeking the meaning of Christian faith today. Thus, fourth, this is a piece of constructive theology - this is the particular responsibility of systematic theology (cf Sykes, 1978:ix). From the substance of faith we are trying to develop our own argument about hope. This personal quality is another feature of systematic theology. It must be noted that, while our indebtedness to many is obvious, this is a thesis on Christian hope, and not on, for example, the theology of Moltmann or Juengel or any other contemporary great. Finally, we have attempted to have some sense of the whole, of the totality of what Christian hope means, and of the inter-relationships within and coherence of the Christian vision of God, the world and human being. It is this which we find to be missing in the selectivity and partial treatment in so much of the theology of hope. These five features mark this work out as a piece of systematic theology.

In the Bible hope is always hope in God, and for Christian faith this is especially hope in God because of Jesus Christ (see eg Barr, 1950; Caird, 1970b; Denbeaux, 1951; Hoffmann, 1976; Moule, 1953; Sasse, 1967; Zimmerli, 1971). Hope is therefore a quite specific attitude, and quite specifically theological in Christian terms. It is a confidence in God which expects certain things because of what he has already done and therefore it must be distinguished from the vague uncertainty, and sometimes blunt irrationality and escapism, of the common usage of phrases such as 'I hope everything will be alright'. Hope for Christian faith is something quite different from that which escaped Pandora's box: it is unambiguously good because it is sustained by the love of God (see Bultmann, 1966). The doctrine of God forms the heart of the thesis. When I was

first exploring the possibility of this topic as a doctoral subject, the now Bishop of Durham, then Professor of Theology in the University of Leeds, asked whether what really bothered me was the question of God. At the time I replied that it was hope and not God which troubled me. Since then I have become increasingly aware of how little Christian hope can be understood unless we allow ourselves to be driven by a constant searching after God. No one will really understand what Christian hope is unless they make some effort to understand what Christian faith means by 'God'. Over and over again, and in every area, the question which this thesis is asking is: 'What hope does Christian faith bring to this aspect of life given that God is as faith finds him to be in Jesus Christ?'.

This means that the thesis is characterised by a certain realism since we believe it is possible to speak meaningfully about God, and we locate this possibility in specific historical achievements, most importantly the life and work of Christ. This christological foundation gives to Christian faith this double realism in that it claims to be able to speak about God and is committed to history from beginning to end. Christian hope has historical foundations, calls forth historical actions, and expects a future which fulfils and does not abandon history. It is because we believe that the power of Christian hope derives from the substance of what faith believes about God, human being and the world, that we do not follow the rejection of theological realism and the trend towards agnosticism seen in some recent British theological writing (eg Cupitt, 1980a; Sutherland, 1984). A critical realism is possible in which we must recognise the role of speculation and human construction in theology but can nevertheless see this as the way in which the truth about God is discovered (see eg Wiles, 1985. Cf Lash, 1982b:76, 'And whether what those narratives [of the New Testament] express is, in the last resort, construction or discovery is, arguably, a question whose resolution is constitutive of the decision of Christian faith'). Our approach is to make use of the resources of the faith in a much less attenuated fashion than is seen in Cupitt and Sutherland (see eg 1984:197-209), 'The Legacy of Theism') in order to be able to speak of hope, and because we believe it is still possible to do this. This does not exclude significant critical revision of the theological tradition, which we undertake when we feel it necessary in order to be faithful to faith's central convictions about God. The question of the relation between the hope offered and the substance of the faith assumed is an interesting question which a comparative study of the work of different theologians might illuminate. Here we suspect that Sutherland's strategy can produce more hope than Cupitt's theology which is not marked by its

concern for the problems of the world, an admirable feature of the former's work. Nevertheless, it must be doubted whether Sutherland's claim that there are grounds for optimism in that Jesus was not overcome by evil can be sustained without a much fuller use of the resources of the Christian tradition than he seems willing to entertain (see Lash, 1985:74-75).

The trinitarian character of the thesis will also be noted. In this we agree with much contemporary European theology in its bringing together of the crucifixion(-resurrection) and God in order to expound a distinctively Christian doctrine of God. This means that we distinguish ourselves from what MacKinnon (1976:103) calls 'a certain impatience with the doctrine of the Trinity' which is another characteristic feature of some recent British theology (see eg Lampe, 1977; Mackey, 1983; Wiles, 1982a:117-29). These authors have raised questions with which any acceptable trinitarian theology of the future must come to terms. Here it must be admitted that the continental discussion seems to take place blissfully unaware of these British doubts. This seems hardly satisfactory. Nevertheless, although the doctrine of the Trinity is by no means free from difficulty, it still seems to us to represent the most adequate attempt to formulate an understanding of God which takes Jesus' death and resurrection as the very substance of God's self-revelation (see MacKinnon again), to offer a path between the inadequacies of both theism and atheism (see eg Kasper, 1984:315-16), and we may doubt whether the distinctive Christian re-thinking of God and his relation to the world, and the notion of person etc, so much part of the riches of the Christian faith and its contribution to intellectual history, would have been possible without it. It is an interesting and important question as to what difference it might make to the content of the hope itself if trinitarian thinking is abandoned, and whether the need to say certain things about hope (eg that God suffers with us) drives us towards the doctrines of incarnation and Trinity, lending a quasi-incarnational character to even those theologies which reject these doctrines formally.

It would appear that any acceptable Christian theology must give central place to 'a unique and distinctive self-giving of God the creator through a unique personal identification of God with the human life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth' (Newlands, 1980a:192). This is why <u>all</u> possible Christian theologies must posit some self-differentiation in God. Thus, for writers such as Lampe, Mackey and Wiles the choice is between trinitarianism and binitarianism but not, significantly, unitarianism. Despite our preference for trinitarianism, it is an open question which of the two can best serve what faith must say. Even among

those theologians whose work is deliberately trinitarian there can be found significantly different interpretations of what the doctrine of the Trinity means. This thesis is worked out within a deliberately trinitarian framework but it leaves open the question of the most adequate formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here we tend to agree with Wiles (1982a: 127) that the doctrine of the Trinity probably says less (and can only say less) about the essential nature of God than the impression given by the trinitarian tradition. Mackey (1983:222-31) argues that the primary function of doctrine is to direct, illuminate and criticise the practice of Christian faith. It is hard to disagree with this, and if it be accepted this would mean that the doctrine of the Trinity is the basic framework, or grammar, of Christian faith and theology. In accepting these valuable points we do not agree, however, that the doctrine of the Trinity can survive a purely economic interpretation. The immanent Trinity alone can preserve the ultimate metaphysical ground of Christian hope in the creative, self-giving life of God (see further Juengel, 1983:369-71; Lash, 1986:188-91).

Thus far we have been trying to explain why we have chosen this subject and to indicate the general approach taken, relating this to important features of contemporary British and European theology. We shall now offer a sketch of how the programme is carried out and how the argument unfolds. This should make it clear <u>what</u> we think we have done in addition to <u>why</u> we should have done it.

In chapter one ('Crucifixion: the Raw Material of Christian Hope') we examine the historical ground of Christian hope in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection with particular reference to atonement and suffering. Christian hope is sustained in the community of the church (the experience of worship, prayer, sacraments, service etc) whose roots always go back to the events surrounding Jesus, above all passion and Easter, as the decisive saving action of God which makes hope possible. It is most important that Christian faith grounds hope in atonement because this recognises that there can be no genuine hope for the world unless the problems which threaten to destroy hope, particularly destructive human actions, are dealt with. Suffering is taken as a particularly severe test of hope. The fact that the cross stands at the heart of Christian hope means that it is neither a form of facile optimism nor of resigned pessimism. Rather, facing fully the hope-denying features of the world, it finds hope in God. The memory of Jesus' death preserves a keen sense of how deeply and totally human hopes can collapse. Yet faith still finds hope because it also

remembers the manner of Jesus' death and that God brought Jesus to resurrection from death. Christian faith can hope for all things despite all things. The depth and resourcefulness of Christian hope exist precisely because faith was born in the world through a resurrection from death when all the human possibilities of the situation had been exhausted. The resurrection of Jesus shows that Jesus was not overcome by evil but rather overcame evil by his death. The divine identification with Jesus (cf the language of exaltation and lordship) shows that he is the human embodiment of God's costly saving love and as such he is pattern or criterion of the kind of action and involvement which is God's way of saving the world. Crucifixion-resurrection can thus be seen as the ground, pattern and logic of Christian hope. This means that resurrection does not detract from the importance of the cross, but rather reveals this fully for the first time. Resurrection sends us in hope into the world which is still in need of being saved because it is thoroughly committed to history and historical action as the means of salvation. Resurrection means that the work of Jesus continues so long as history continues to be unredeemed. It is also the promise that his work, and our participation in it, will not be in vain. In making the life and love of Jesus available to the church and the world, it is also the power in which such costly service can be rendered.

In chapter two ('Death and Resurrection in the Perspective of Jesus' Resurrection') we explore further the historical and theological basis of the Easter faith. It can be shown that a solid historical foundation exists for this even if the evidence cannot prove the truth of the Easter faith. The theology of death and resurrection can be hinted at but inevitably difficulties and puzzles remain. A trinitarian theology can give place to both Jesus' achievement in his manner of dying and the fact that only the Father could raise him from the dead. This allows us to take Jesus' death seriously while not laying all the stress on the action of God. A trinitarian theology sees the possibilities of resurrection in the intrinsically creative inner life of God, into which Jesus dies. The theology of creation and the theology of resurrection must be brought together. Jesus' death as an event within the life of God can be taken most seriously when we pay attention to the silence and uneventfulness of Holy Saturday. We look at various metaphors for this and conclude that the use of the idea of a temporal interruption in the life of God (Juengel) is better than that of passivity (von Balthasar) which <u>may</u> be an evasion of the reality of death, and that of breakdown in the life of God (Moltmann) which makes resurrection theoretically impossible. Christian faith does

not give hope to death simply in the thought of life after death. This could easily turn out to be an evasion of the fact of our mortality. Christian hope should help people to find positive significance in the fact of death itself. However, Christian faith does also hope for life after death and this is an essential component of Christian belief. Theologians themselves often express unhappiness with the idea of life after death or believe that there is nothing which can be said about it. In discussing the most important objections we try to show how the positive concern in each does not require us to give up the thought of life after death, or to give up trying to say something about it. We can sketch something of the hope for life after death because it is essentially the fulfilment of what we trust God to be doing with our lives now. It is very important to realise that this is the nature of eschatology. By means of a cautious extrapolation from the present we suggest that three key features of a Christian eschatology are: 1. the bodily nature of Christian hope; 2. the social nature of human fulfilment; 3. the hope for a renewed creation as the sphere of human fulfilment but the purpose of which must not be defined exclusively in these terms.

In chapter three ('The Hope that All Shall be Saved') we examine the case for universalism which we find to be strong. It is curious that discussions of hope do not often treat this explicitly since, clearly, Christian hope is a very different matter depending upon what it decides here. The priority and logic of grace - ie crucifixion-resurrection as the paradigm for the Christian doctrine of God - points to universalism as the outcome of God's involvement with the world. This can only be a matter of hope and prayer but it does seem to be the interpretation of the conviction that 'all shall be well' which corresponds best to the Christian doctrine of God. On the way to this conclusion we offer a critical discussion of the teachings of scripture, the doctrine of hell and the other objections which are often made to universalism. If God's purposes of love are to be fulfilled for all men and women this will require more time than this life affords. We cannot think of any simple transition from the incompleteness of this life to the perfection of the final consummation. A more gradual process corresponds to our current experience of grace. The case for a growth towards perfection is therefore pressing. This being the case, it may be that a suitably broadened and evangelically informed doctrine of purgatory can fulfil a useful task here.

In chapter four ('The Practice of Christian Hope: the Necessity and Shape of Christian Involvement in Society') we give a detailed discussion in order to stress the importance of the practice of hope now in this

world, and to show what this might mean. Since it is often claimed that Christianity should keep out of politics we show how a number of the most important Christian doctrines suggest quite the opposite, and that if we are seriously interested in framing a better human future politics is both inevitable and important. However, it is important that the complex relation between theology and politics should not be naively and dangerously over-simplified. To this end we show the usefulness of middle axioms. However, effective action must be concrete action towards concrete goals. The whole church will not often agree about what these are or the means of their realisation. Rather than preventing action this should lead to a number of actions by different groups within the church, often working with those outside of the church, and at different levels. Moreover, the church(es) should not settle for political pluralism unless this is really the only faithful response to the situation and the gospel. Such pluralism may have the effect of blunting the political cutting edge of the Christian faith. It is possible and necessary sometimes for the churches to act as one politically. This has happened increasingly during the course of this government as the churches have felt a growing alarm about the values and consequences of government policy. The initiative taken in the commissioning and publication of Faith in the City could be the beginning of a more effective political involvement on the part of the churches. We try to indicate the kind of change which we believe Christian hope should promote in British society today. Returning to the cross as the model for the actions of Christian hope, in a concluding section we discuss the use of power and violence in promoting change, and the importance of forgiveness in the practice of politics.

The thesis finishes with some 'Closing Thoughts'. Here we stress the unfinished nature of all theology worthy of the name. We present a list of our main findings and indicate some of the work still to be done in the light of this exploration of Christian hope.

Finally, we should point out that there are no notes. The Harvard system is used throughout and all references in the text correspond to the entries in the bibliography at the end of the thesis. Two books appeared too late to be used as much as we would have liked: 1. John Webster's Eberhard Juengel (1986) and 2. Ray Anderson's Theology, Death and Dying (1986).

CHAPTER ONE

Crucifixion: the Raw Material of Christian Hope

Introduction

The Christian faith was born in the world through the historical achievement of Jesus. The basis of hope is to be found in the victory of his life, death and resurrection over the features of the world which frustrate and sometimes destroy our hopes for the achievement of true humanity. In this chapter we shall concentrate upon the hope(s) which the Christian faith brings to the threats posed to the task of being human by the presence of sin, moral evil and suffering. In chapter two we shall explore the Christian hope in the face of death.

It is of the utmost importance for the proper understanding of Christian hope that we remember always the harsh reality of Jesus' crucifixion. We must take care that the horror with which crucifixion was viewed and the fact that it suggested anything but hope for the world is not hidden from us by the comfortable and familiar language of 'the cross' (Kaesemann, 1975:4. Cf Hengel, 1977b). The importance of remembering this is that it saves the Christian hope from degenerating into a facile optimism which has not yet faced squarely the powerful challenges to hope in the world. Such facile optimism cannot offer real hope to the world because it has no means of dealing with the obstacles to hope of which more observant people are well aware. Christian hope can offer real hope for the world because it is grounded in God's transformation of the human situation through the historical achievement of Jesus in his victory over sin, suffering, evil and death. This means that Christian hope distances itself from both forms of facile optimism and resigned pessimism. If God triumphs in the death and resurrection of Jesus, there are no grounds for giving up hope for the world. Christian hope is realistic about the negative features of the world, and yet, precisely because it finds God at work in the midst of these to bring life out of death, it is not deterred by such things. In fact, because of its ground in God, it hopes for even more than that which is usually indicated by being 'realistic' about the world. Christian hope sees more possibilities in the human situation than other forms of hope because it is convinced that God is with us. It holds out to the world the presence of new human possibilities while not restricting the possibilities of any situation to what can be done by human action.

Christian hope is grounded in Jesus' death and resurrection as the totality of what happened in his history. Christian faith is faith in the risen Jesus and had God not raised him from the dead it is most unlikely that there would have emerged a Christian community. It is not altogether impossible that the Easter faith of the first disciples was self-generating, but the most straightforward reading of the documents does not suggest this, and the rise of the Easter faith seems much more intelligible if we suppose it to have been occasioned by subsequent events which convinced the followers of Jesus that he was no longer dead but risen. Christian hope is grounded in the history of death and resurrection, and in the God who is present in this history. It must be understood according to the logic of death and resurrection. The ultimate metaphysical ground of Christian hope is in the activity of God in Jesus' death and resurrection. In chapter two we shall pay particular attention to the historical and theological issues surrounding the basis of Christian hope in Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, although this chapter is particularly concerned with Jesus' crucifixion, it must be borne in mind that this is always in the wider context of resurrection. Jesus' death alone is not a sign of hope for the world in Christian understanding. By itself, it may offer some encouragement to human faithfulness and self-giving, and therefore be an important victory against cynicism and selfishness within these terms of reference. By contrast, Christians, on account of their belief in resurrection, find in Jesus' death the means and the promise of a total victory. Although theologians sometimes speak, as McFague (1983:324) does, of 'a new way of being in the world that is grounded in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth', this cannot be a Christian statement of the matter if it omits the vital significance of Jesus' resurrection for Christian faith and hope.

There are two further points which should be made concerning the historical and theological grounding of Christian hope in Jesus' death and resurrection. The first is that resurrection does not remove us from history and the still unredeemed features of it. Resurrection does not cancel the reality of Jesus' sufferings, nor does it mean that since he is risen all suffering is now overcome. Thus Simon (1967:101) complained in his A Theology of Auschwitz:

> Christian theology is, sometimes rightly, suspected of circumventing the tragic nucleus too soon and too easily. It may reach out to the Resurrection too superficially, as if to leave behind the cross and the smoke from the chimneys. Its

> instinct is in line with all human feeling for comedy (cf Wiles, 1982a:72).

The resurrection does not take our eyes away from the costliness and difficulty of hope, but rather invites us to take up the cross because it confirms the way of Jesus as God's way of saving the world. Suffering, evil, sin and death are not overcome at a stroke. They remain to be engaged hopefully in the conviction that Jesus continues to give himself to the world. Cross and resurrection form the historical ground and abiding logic and pattern of Christian hope.

The second point is that Christian hope is grounded in the action and presence of God in Jesus. It is at one and the same time both christological and theological. The resurrection shows that Jesus is the personal self-giving of God. He is the enfleshed love of God in our midst. It is absolutely basic to the New Testament that his self-giving is the self-giving of God, and as such it gains its victory over the world.

In what follows we shall pay particular attention to the significance for Christian hope of the fact that it is grounded in God's saving of the world through the historical self-giving of Jesus. Before considering how Jesus' engagement with sin and evil brings hope to the world, we must first of all consider whether the historical evidence surrounding Jesus' life and death makes it possible to claim that his self-giving is also the self-giving of God. Unless this is a plausible claim, the theological basis of Christian hope will be undermined from the outset by its incompatibility with the history in which it is supposed to be grounded.

i The historical foundations

(a) The historical causes of Jesus' death

Any discussion of the historical problems surrounding Jesus is not likely to afford more than varying degrees of probability. The task is necessary, however, because 'Christian faith - and therefore Christian theology - are radically dependent upon particular historical events' (Lash, 1979a: xiii). We can take encouragement for this task from recent New Testament scholarship's degree of confidence about our ability to gain access to the history (see eg Rowland, 1985:131; Sanders, 1985:2). We are interested in the cause(s) of Jesus' death and his approach to his end.

Although the precise details of the process which led to Jesus' public

execution by the Romans are unclear, in general terms it is not difficult to see that his public teachings and actions made his death increasingly likely. As Sanders puts it: 'A man who spoke of a kingdom, spoke against the temple, and had a following was one marked for execution'. He argues that the first Christians knew the general course of events but they were not in any position to have detailed knowledge of what had happened. The key event which most probably led to Jesus' death was his demonstration against the temple. It is 'the last public event in Jesus' life: he lived long enough for it, but not much longer. In this case it seems entirely reasonable to argue post hoc ergo propter hoc'. The strength of this thesis, Sanders suggests, is threefold: 1. Jesus' challenge is intelligible within the framework of the Jewish restoration eschatology of his day where he is to be located. 2. Such a challenge would have provided ample reason for the high priest to issue the order to have Jesus arrested and interrogated. 3. A physical demonstration with a noticeable public following 'could readily have led the Romans to think that Jesus was a threat to public order'. If Jesus' disciples thought of him as king, and Judas' betrayal consisted in making this known, the Jewish authorities would have had a specific charge to present to Pilate, and one which he could hardly ignore (1985:295, 299, 310, 302, 304, 305). 'The wording of the titulus as it is reported in the Gospels is in all likelihood authentic' (Bammel, 1984b:363).

Rowland agrees with Sanders that the temple incident is of crucial significance for the historical investigation of why Jesus was killed. He believes that texts such as Luke 13.33 and John 7.3f point to the fact that Jesus deliberately chose to challenge the Jewish nation at the centre of its religious activity as a prophetic act. The fact that this took place at Passover 'when hopes for a national deliverance ran high, made him a natural target for the priestly and aristocratic faction'. Although it is unlikely that there was a formal trial of Jesus, an official legal enquiry into Jesus' actions and teachings may have been taking place for some time. The word against the temple may well have been the final act which sealed Jesus' fate (1985:165, 173).

The confusion which exists in our sources concerning the so-called trial(s) of Jesus may reflect 'the fact that there was no orderly procedure which was noted and remembered' (Sanders, 1985:317). Since crucifixion could only be imposed on the authority of the governor it seems virtually certain that Jesus stood trial before Pontius Pilate. It also seems highly probable that his conviction on the charge of sedition was the result of intervention by the Jews. The Jewish interrogation before Jesus was handed

over to the Romans may perhaps be understood best as a period of informal hearings to decide on the evidence against Jesus and which charge to put before the Romans. It is probably impossible to reconstruct in any detail what happened that night, why, and who the main actors were (see Rowland, 1985:164-74 and Sanders, 1985:309-11). The impression of confusion during that night given by the gospels may well be a faithful one, even if the details are not to be taken at face value, since it is possible 'that no Jewish court before which Jesus appeared was able to agree, either upon the exact nature of his offence, or upon the question of his legal guilt or innocence' due to conflicting attitudes to the law at the time. If this was the case, and the Jewish authorities thought it necessary to get rid of Jesus, 'then the only course left open to them was to hand him over to the court of the Roman governor' (Harvey, 1982:30).

This discussion of the possible causes of Jesus's death shows that it was a consequence of his mission and the extent to which he was prepared to carry this out by taking his challenge to the very centre of Jewish life. Jesus died as a result of a conflict within Judaism. Sanders (1985:296) makes the important observation that 'once one turns to an internal conflict within Judaism as the principal cause of Jesus' death, it is incorrect to make a rigid distinction between "religious" and "political" reasons'. Here we must also remember that 'crucifixion was a religious-political punishment, the emphasis falling on the latter although any strict division is inappropriate in the ancient world' (Hengel, 1977b:46). Although Jesus was not a revolutionary like the Zealots and did not allow himself 'to be used by the mouthpieces of the different activisms of his day' (Bammel, 1984a:56), there is an inescapably political character to his ministry and death. This can be seen in the facts that his ministry involved conflict within Judaism and posed a threat to established authority, that the outcome of his interrogation by the Jews was the product of a conflict between different parties, and that his execution undoubtedly owed something to the leverage which the Jewish authorities must have been able to exercise upon the Roman governor in the light of the uneasy relationship between host country and occupying power and the imminence of the potentially volatile Passover.

Riches (1980:171) argues that we must be alert to the positive theological implications of the fact that 'God's dealings with men [are] . . . mediated through the man who grapples with his society's fundamental assumptions about power'. Even if this overstates the matter a little, the importance of this for our present discussion of the historical ground of

hope is that atonement and politics must not be treated in isolation from each other. In the story of Jesus they are wedded together. This should keep us mindful of the inadequacy of any abstractly individual approach to the question of salvation, since on the one hand Jesus died more as a consequence of corporate failures than individual sins, and on the other salvation enters the world not simply by changing individuals but more fundamentally by changing the structural constraints, both religious and political, within which these individuals live. The story of Jesus should also make us aware of how far politics is concerned with enabling groups of people with different interests to live together. Jesus' death probably was felt necessary in order to preserve the uneasy status quo produced by the failure of politics. Remembrance of this should give the Christian hope a deep sense of solidarity with the victims of political executions designed to prolong a regime which can only survive because of its violent suppression of any challenge. If politics involves both the need for reconciliation and the presence of failure, it would seem to require an interpretation and a practice in which theological categories are essential. Thus, attention to the historical circumstances of Jesus' death warns us against the privatisation of salvation and points us to the theological dimension of politics.

(b) Jesus' approach to his death

It is difficult to believe that Jesus did not reckon with the possibility of his own death. 'One would have to declare Jesus something of a simpleton if it were maintained that he went up from Galilee to Jerusalem in all innocence, without any idea of the deadly opposition he was to encounter there' (Schillebeeckx, 1979:299). The fact that Jesus anticipated his own death seems assured by the stories of Gethsemane and the Last Supper. Although there are difficulties over detail and interpretation, it is hard to deny an essential historical core to these stories. The scandal of 'a struggle on Jesus' part over the inevitability of the fate of death and the disciples' complete failure in this situation of danger' (Kuemmel, 1974:90), and the early Christian practice of celebrating the eucharist point strongly to authenticity. The likelihood that Jesus provided an interpretation of his coming death is increased if Sanders is correct in thinking that Jesus deliberately symbolised the coming kingdom by three gestures: the temple, the supper, the entry. Indeed, he argues, the Last Supper shows 'that Jesus did not despair of thinking, even when he saw that he was to die, that the kingdom which he

had expected would come ' (1985:307). The immediacy of the Christian interpretation of Jesus' death as atoning is certainly remarkable. Indeed, so early was it that '(t)here is no clear way of pointing to a pure resurrection kerygma without a soteriological interpretation of the death of Jesus'. Hengel concludes that this is explained best if '(i)t was not primarily their own theological reflections, but above all the interpretative sayings of Jesus at the Last Supper which showed them how to understand his death properly' (1981:70, 73. Cf 1979). This is a possibility which cannot be dismissed lightly. Jeremias is typical of a previous generation of scholars who wrote with some confidence about Jesus' understanding of his death by exegeting the Gethsemane and Last Supper narratives and some other passages. In his classic study, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, he argued:

> This is therefore what Jesus said at the Last Supper about the meaning of his death: his death is the vicarious death of the suffering servant, which atones for the sins of the 'many', the peoples of the world, which ushers in the beginning of the final salvation and which effects the new covenant with God (1966:231. Cf Goppelt, 1981:227).

The two most recent books on Jesus show that a younger generation of New Testament scholars are likely to express more reticence about Jesus' interpretation of his death while not denying that he did provide a theological interpretation which was decisive for the early Christian communities. Given that our sources are products of these communities it is very difficult indeed to separate out what is likely to have been Jesus' original teaching from the later teaching of the first Christians. However much we may find in the stories of the Last Supper, Sanders brings forward some important objections to the idea that Jesus went to Jerusalem intending to die for others, perhaps most important of all that:

> . . . all the sayings which attribute to Jesus the will to die correspond so closely with what happened, and with early Christian doctrine, that the case for their creation by the early church is overwhelmingly strong. The criterion of dissimilarity is by no means infallible, but here it must come into play.

It is probably better to think of Jesus, when it became clear that he was to die, 'just accepting his death and trusting that God would redeem the situation and vindicate him' (1985:332). Rowland gives a bolder appraisal in his conviction that 'Jesus explained the significance of his death as the sealing of a new covenant' (1985:177. Cf Kuemmel, 1974:94).

In sum it seems probable that Jesus went to Jerusalem to bring his challenge to the Judaism of his day to a climax. He did not enter the city with the express purpose of offering himself up in death, although he must have reckoned with the possibility of his protest leading to his execution. However, it seems almost certain that he had accepted the inevitability of his death by the time of the Last Supper. There can be little doubt that he spoke about his death on this occasion, even if it is difficult to know just what he said. The Gethsemane narrative indicates the struggle which Jesus had to accept this as part of his mission from God. If it is true that he did not seek death, it must also be said that he did not seek to escape death if this involved betraying his vocation. For Jesus death was not to be avoided at any cost. His whole ministry had been devoted to the service of God and his coming kingdom, and in faithfulness and trust he was prepared even for death. In the context of this foregoing life, as Schillebeeckx (1979:311) points out, the absence of any assured verbal interpretation of how Jesus viewed his death 'is really irrelevant. Jesus' whole life is the hermeneusis of his death'. The actions of that last evening, especially the offering of the cup of fellowship, demonstrated that Jesus had accepted his death as his final obedience to the Father. This does not require us to think that Jesus thought of his death in terms of atonement although we cannot discount this possibility. It is better to offer a more reticent appraisal given the uncertainty of our sources. But the fact that we may be obliged to give a more modest account of Jesus' understanding of his death by no means counts against the interpretation of his death in terms of atonement by the first Christians. The historical reconstruction which we have offered is certainly compatible with this theology. Indeed, as Hengel (1981:68) stresses, there is an intrinsic connection between interpretation in terms of atonement and the experience of Jesus' resurrection since the latter both added urgency to and overcame the guilt which accompanied the failure and desertion of the disciples.

'All the gospels stress the fact that Jesus embraced death of his own free will' (Schillebeeckx, 1979:274). This is an important conclusion of our historical reconstruction. In this connection it is generally agreed that the common use by the New Testament writers of the language of 'handing over' (in Greek, paradidonai) for the deliverance of Jesus into

the hands of his executioners is highly significant. Harvey outlines the rich variety of meanings which this word conveys, and in particular the theological mystery at the heart of Jesus' passion. If faith confesses that God handed him over (Romans 8.32), it is equally important that the word 'comes to express the mysterious self-giving of Jesus which is at the heart of the Christian understanding of redemption' (Galatians 2.20; Ephesians 5.20) (1982:24). Therefore it is puzzling to find that Pannenberg characterises Jesus' ministry and death in the sharply contrasting themes of activity and fate (cf Berkhof, 1979:300). He understands this distinction as follows:

> Fate designates what is sent, what happens to Jesus, in distinction from his work and activity. The mission of Jesus also belongs on the side of his work and activity insofar as it has been actively accomplished by him. Hence, it is set in contrast to the fate of Jesus as what is sent to him by God and is to be suffered and accepted by him.

Jesus' fate includes both his crucifixion and resurrection since neither 'was actively accomplished by Jesus'. Although we find some 'indications that Jesus on his own initiative had taken to himself the fate awaiting him', his death must still be seen fundamentally as something which happened to him and not 'his own action in the same sense as his activity with its message' (1968a:32, 245). It would be wrong to suggest that there is no truth in Pannenberg's use of this distinction. Once Jesus was arrested he could no longer control what was to happen <u>to</u> him. A passivity is forced upon him which reaches its height in his death. We do not know just how Jesus finally died although the gospels do not give the impression of sheer passivity. Undoubtedly the final stages of dying often impose what appears to be an almost total passivity. But this is not always the case. We have strong grounds for believing that Jesus embraced his death as something sent to him by God to be suffered and accepted. If it is put this way, Pannenberg's account seems to understate the active side of Jesus' suffering and dying. It seems clear that in going to his death Jesus' commitment to God and his mission became radically complete. Perhaps then we should say that his death was his own action in an even stronger sense than his ministry. 'Without ceasing to be action, as action in the strongest sense of the word, as the work of God on earth attaining its goal, His action becomes passion' (Barth, 1956:238). Here we should also ponder the words of Freud which Kueng (1980:307) uses to pay the

former a fine compliment in relation to his life, achievement and difficult death: 'Towards the actual person who has died we adopt a special attitude: something like admiration for someone who has accomplished a very difficult task'. Barth (1956:245) put the matter emphatically when he wrote that 'it is with a free self-offering . . . and therefore with an act and not a fate that we have to do in this passion'.

Lash (1981:260) reminds us concerning Jesus 'that as victim, he was also "agent"', transcribing historically the agency of God, is central to Christian belief in the possibility of imperishable human freedom'. Pannenberg is in danger of obscuring the agency of Jesus, the cross as his work of redemption. In placing an almost exclusive stress on the passivity of Jesus' dying he may have driven a fatal wedge between the activity of Jesus and the activity of God. Unless we can bring out more clearly the active embracing of his death in a total self-giving it will be very difficult, perhaps impossible, to see how Jesus' death is the historical expression and enactment of the redemptive self-giving of God. Pannenberg's account invites the usual objection to double agency that the theological claim is asked to bear an unsupportable weight because it is not compatible with the historical occurrence which occasions it.

We have seen that it is not necessary to think of Jesus having believed everything the first or later Christians believe about his death for this belief to be a legitimate interpretation of what happened. What we are saying now is that it would not be legitimate to claim that Jesus' death is the saving event of God's self-giving love unless Jesus did willingly and actively give himself in the service of God's kingdom. If this is correct we have identified an important minimum historical condition of the possibility of a Christian soteriology, and shown that this is fulfilled.

(c) The agency of Jesus and the agency of God

We noted in our 'Introduction' that Christian hope is grounded in the saving action of God in Jesus' death and resurrection. The theological ground of Christian hope requires us to think in terms of a double agency. This becomes necessary in order to give a proper account of the fact that in Jesus it is God himself who is encountered. Thus the New Testament says that 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5.19). The death of Jesus is the complete human expression of the love which God has for the world: '. . . God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 5.8). It would be

difficult to claim that the self-giving of God's love is encountered in Jesus' life and death if it could be shown that he did not expect and did not actively embrace his death out of love for his Father, ie if he did not give himself as an act of human fidelity. Our historical reconstruction has shown that Jesus did anticipate his death and did give himself over to it as the final sealing of his love for his Father and his commitment to the coming of his kingdom. As such, the history is at least compatible with the basic claim that here the love of God is met. The history could never require this theological interpretation in the strong sense that no other is possible. But it does make the claim possible and plausible. Insofar as the hope which Jesus' death gives rise to is a total hope, arising out of the conquest of death and therefore the transcending of all merely human possibilities, and the vision of life which it suggests the most comprehensive, this does suggest that this hope is best understood in terms of the presence and activity of God. This is a brief indication of how the history may require to be understood in this way in the weaker sense of the theological interpretation being the most fitting in the light of the content of the hope. Our main point, however, is that the most likely historical reconstruction is compatible with a view of the agency of Jesus being the human embodiment of the agency of God.

Since the notion of double agency would appear to be necessary for a proper understanding of Christian hope, and yet has also been rejected by some theologians, it is important that we discuss the major difficulties and see whether these are surmountable in the case of Jesus. In a sympathetic but critical discussion of Austin Farrer's treatment of double agency, Wiles feels that even in his skilful hands

> . . . the understanding of divine agency is so distantly analogical and so unrelated to the causal story that we tell of the happening of events, that we appear to be left without even a direction in which to look to give intelligibility to the concept of particular divine actions (1981:248. Cf 1982c).

It is certainly the case that it is very difficult indeed to see how <u>any</u> notion of double agency can be posited of an event where the human motives seem to have <u>nothing</u> in common with, perhaps flatly contradict, the divine activity we wish to affirm there. This makes it necessary to restrict the use of the notion of double agency to only historical events where the human activity is compatible with rendering the divine. Our historical

reconstruction of Jesus' death was designed specifically to show that the manner of Jesus' death does make it possible to see in it the human expression of the self-giving of God. The positing of a double agency in Jesus' death does not involve a simple equation between the agency of Jesus and the agency of God. A trinitarian theology of the cross will be more differentiated than this, and the need for such distinction in our talk about the agencies involved is implicit in the conviction that Jesus died into the hands of God and was raised from death by God. Thus, as Rahner (1981c:37) says, 'in classical Christology the "is" in statements . . . such as "Jesus is God", "God is man", does not mean identity between subject and predicate, as it does in our other "is" statements. It means only a unity and a link'. Any reflection on the christological basis of Christian hope must keep before it the axiomatic truth that the action of God and the action of man are not exactly the same and on the same level. But to accept that the gulf is so wide ('so distantly analogical') as to disallow any talk of double agency would seem to put at risk affirmations which lie at the very heart of the gospel, such as: 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him' (1 John 4.9). Such a basic Christian conviction does not require the overlooking of the distinction between human and divine, but it does require that at least at one point, namely in the person of Jesus, the self-giving of a man and the love of God are one (cf Surin, 1982a).

It is difficult to conceive of any Christian theology which would not involve the recognition of the embodiment of the mystery of God in Jesus' faithfulness unto death. This basic Christian conviction appears to be moving in the direction of a double agency. Despite his rejection of the notion of double agency, Wiles' own theology moves towards this at certain crucial points. Thus his statement that 'the cross speaks parabolically of God's way to the overcoming of evil' (1982a:74) suggests that there must be a significant continuity, similarity, analogy between the action of God and the human action of Jesus. It is the personal unity between God and Jesus, implicit in his ministry and explicit in his resurrection, which is the ontological ground of the fact that he is the human embodiment of the self-giving love of God.

Wiles' rejection of the notion of double agency is traceable ultimately to his difficult distinction between divine purpose and divine activity. Thus, Lash asks of his understanding of the history to which the Bible bears witness; 'If we have reason for saying that it is God's purpose that we discern in these events, does it not follow that, in some special

sense, we ascribe the events to God?' Lash presses home his point by asking 'How could we know that the passion demonstrates what is true of God's eternal nature if we did not have grounds for believing that, in that passion, God expressed his nature?' In other words, contrary to Wiles' prohibition, we must 'speak of the Cross as . . . a special, historically particular act of God'. Lash concludes that Wiles commits a methodological error by establishing his doctrine of God and 'the limits of Christian theological discourse in advance of any detailed discussion of its principal subject-matters' (1979b:115, 116-17, 120). The christological centre of Christian belief in God obliges us to think that the activity of God can be seen in particular, historical human actions, especially those of Christ. Wiles rejects the doctrine of the incarnation, but it may not be so easily dispensed with if the peculiarly Christian ground of Christian hope is to be indicated. Even though he rejects the doctrine of the incarnation, his own theology would appear to require this and indeed it often makes use of what we might consider to be quasi-incarnational language, as in the central stress that Jesus is the human image and parable of God (1982a:61, 70, 74). We might almost say, 'the human embodiment of the mystery of God'.

Christian faith and hope are grounded in the fact that God's love is seen most clearly in Jesus and his saving work. If this is true then it must be the case that there is meaningful continuity between Jesus' self-giving and the self-giving of God. The gospel requires and demonstrates the notion of double agency because it sets forth Jesus as 'the human form of God's fidelity' (Lash, 1981:192). To relinquish this difficult and problematic notion is to threaten the gospel by placing too much distance between God and the human life and death of Jesus.

ii Salvation as the ground of hope: fundamental features of the theology of atonement

It is a curious feature of much of the 'theology of hope' of the last twenty years that the theme of atonement rarely appears (see eg Capps, 1970, 1972; Cousins, 1972). This neglect is curious because in making atonement central to its understanding of hope, Christian faith recognises that it is not possible to have any genuine hope unless the sin and evil in the world can be overcome. That this is overcome, and continues to be overcome, in the self-giving of Jesus, is the rock upon which faith stands and the experience in which hope is continually sustained and renewed.

There can be hope for the world because God identifies with us, enters into the situation which threatens our future, and transforms it so that new hopeful possibilities are given to us. In the three sub-sections which follow we shall discuss how the transformation which the work of Jesus achieves may be understood in the light of his history and the vision of God to which it gives rise.

(a) Jesus's death as the work of creative love

The most important thing to be said about any acceptable doctrine of atonement is that it must be consistent with the vision of God to which Jesus' death and resurrection give rise. It is the unanimous witness of the New Testament that it is the love of God which saves the world since he does so by sending Jesus to us. Jesus' death is the proof of God's love for the world (see eg Romans 5.8). This is so fundamental to the experience of salvation that the simplest yet most important Christian confession is that 'God is love' (1 John 4.7. Cf Juengel, 1983:314). Love is essentially unconditional, personal and creative. Unfortunately this has sometimes been obscured in the history of atonement theology. A good example of an approach which is basically unChristian is the transactional theory because it obscures the basis of salvation in the love of God and treats us as less than fully personal. In addition to the moral difficulties of any supposed transaction between Jesus and God, such a way of thinking about the cross prevents us from seeing that the love which saves the world is given unconditionally as a gracious initiative. The doctrine of the Trinity grounds salvation in the free spontaneity of the God who is eternally in himself an overflowing of love. A transactional approach also fails to uncover the fundamentally personal meaning of sin as being against love since it replaces the personal language of grace in relation to the activity of Christ and the Spirit with 'the impersonal categories of merit, reward, punishment and transaction' (Lampe, 1956:95). The primacy of love for Christian hope is therefore twofold since it is God's self-sacrificing love which comes to us and creates hope by overcoming our fundamental failure to love. By giving itself to the other God's love refuses to accept the breakdown of our relationship with him and the rupture of fellowship between individuals and communities. Love is essentially creative because it goes out of itself and offers new possibilities to the other.

By refusing to divide the historical action of Jesus from the eternal activity of God, the doctrine of the Trinity also makes clear that the love

which saves the world is the love of the creator. This is most important, not only because it indicates the ultimate metaphysical ground of Christian hope, but also because it shows us that the work of salvation is a creative act. Thus Paul could describe the experience of being in Christ as being a new creation (2 Corinthians 5.17). As such the experience of salvation is a gift because in Jesus God gives to the world new possibilities which transform its old existence. This remaking of human existence, which is the focus but not the entirety of God's saving work (see eg Romans 8.21), must not be understood in relation to Jesus' death and resurrection alone. Salvation is focussed and grounded here, but it can be spoken of properly only if it is related to ecclesiology and pneumatology since the love which saves the world is a love which goes on giving itself.

The fact that God's love in Jesus remakes human existence means that Jesus' death and resurrection are not simply revelatory of the human condition and of the divine love. Love changes the receiver. It is not enough to say that God's love is revealed on the cross. Rather his love for us is revealed as it also grasps hold of us and transforms us. Exemplary and 'acceptance' soteriologies fail to take full account of this. McGrath (1985:217, 219) summarises the former neatly:

> In its most naive form, the exemplarist theory of the Atonement consisted in the assertion that Christ's death upon the cross revealed the full extent of God's love for man, and thence inspired an appropriate moral response on man's part.

The chief difficulty with this theory of the saving power of Christ's death is that 'it is all too evident that man needs more than education about God - he requires liberation from the matrix of forces which imprison him'. In showing his love for us in Jesus, God does not simply invite us to change our ways; he gives himself to us so that with his love in our hearts we might be able to change.

In this way a proper grasp of atonement saves Christian hope from underestimating the depth of the obstacles to a better human future. Here it is worth pointing out that the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' are often used in an unsatisfactory fashion. The atonement is objective in that it is grounded in God's saving transformation of the human situation. This is 'the fundamental idea that the Atonement is, above all, a movement of God to man, not in the first place a movement of man to God' (Aulén, 1970:159). But as Macquarrie remarks: 'Man cannot be saved as, let us say, a burning building can be saved, by an action that is entirely external to

him. This would be to make the whole matter subpersonal'. In other words, for a genuine transformation of the human situation there must be both the activity of God which transforms us and the human response which this activity makes possible. Some proponents of so-called 'objective' theories of the atonement actually underestimate the love of God on the cross by thinking that this is only revelatory and not also transformative, while some so-called 'subjective' theories display a Pelagian moral naivety because they 'never really get beyond the notion of an imitatio Christi . . . [which] misses the dimension of grace that takes the initiative and works in the very being of man' (Macquarrie, 1978b:316, 317. Cf Tillich, 1978b:170-173).

(b) Judgement, identification and transformation

Atonement is essential to Christian hope because it preserves both a recognition of and a dealing with the fundamental problems of the human situation in their true moral depth. Love deals with us as persons and therefore seeks to renew us in the moral core of our being. This takes place through the identification and transformation which Jesus achieves through the judgement which he effects in our midst. Mere identification with us in our plight would not be ground for hope. Judgement involves both the bringing out into the open of the plight of the world and the renewal of the world. This is why transformation is a key concept for Christian hope in both its foundations and practice.

MacKinnon rightly remarks that the history of atonement theory 'bears witness to a continuing awareness that any presentation of the work of Christ merits rejection as morally trivial, if it does not touch the deepest contradictions of human life'. In the light of this he is deeply unconvinced that what he calls 'acceptance' theologies are an adequate substitute for a proper sense of the judgement of the cross (1967a:172, 178). The truth in the language of 'acceptance' is that God loves us unconditionally just as we are. However, what this language fails to bring out is that the cross is not at all God's acceptance of the status quo. If this was so the cross could not possibly be the ground of hope for the world. The cross is ground for hope because it is God's determination not to accept the way things are. This is what God's judgement is about. Jesus' faithfulness unto death is a judgement upon us all. The fact that when God gives himself to the world in Jesus he is rejected and the one who embodies his love is crucified shows the depth of our estrangement from God, and as such it is the supreme judgement upon the world. This shows us

that the way salvation comes into the world is not simply through a revelation of God's love which elicits our loving response. Such an understanding saves the world and finds hope too easily because it neglects the historical path which God's saving love took. Our response came only after his love had endured the rejection of the cross and entered into the joy of the resurrection. It is because Jesus passes through this and comes back to us that his judgement does not leave the world in despair but renews it in hope.

With this in mind it is significant that the theme of judgement has played an important role from the very earliest interpretations of Christ's crucifixion. This can be seen in the prophetic-apocalyptic language of darkness which means that '(w)hat happened on the cross was anticipated last judgement and thus a turning point, a new beginning' (Weber, 1979b: 50). In his exposition of Christ as 'The Judge Judged in Our Place' Barth recognised the necessity of judgement in God's saving activity in Christ: 'If He were not the Judge, He would not be the Saviour' (1956: 211-83, 217). Because God is love he judges the world in order to renew it. Such renewal must deal with the corruption of our innermost being in turning from God. In the death of Jesus, God himself enters into his own judgement so that, in the words of MacKinnon (1967:181), 'the very foundations of the moral universe are found in the concreteness of a historical ordeal'. God saves the world by placing himself in the midst of human life where he suffers the ultimate cost of the world's estrangement from himself in the crucifixion of the Son, the rejection of the gift of himself in the person of Jesus. The precise meaning of MacKinnon's words is not easy to determine. They certainly exemplify his commitment to realism on christological grounds (see Wignall, 1980:75). His words suggest that it is of the essence of the work of Christ that in his faithfulness unto death he re-creates authentic human existence in his own person. Taking up this thought we may say that in the complete self-offering of Jesus, the depths of the world's estrangement are used as the occasion for his perfect obedience, and so the human situation is turned round and brought back to God.

Therefore, this thought of God entering into his own judgement is far removed from any crude ideas of a God who must punish Jesus in order to forgive us. Against this it must be said that it is God who takes the judgement to himself, who bears his own wrath for us. The 'wrath of God' must not be understood anthropomorphically as if God's anger had to be appeased. Rather it is a technical term of eschatology which describes the in-built destructive consequences of sin and evil which ensure that they

can have no lasting place in God's world (Richardson, 1958:224. Cf Hanson, 1957). 'Wrath is the judgment that falls upon sin in the moral order which God rules' (Ladd, 1974a:425). 'Punishment' is a quite inadequate rendering of 'judgement' since 'the activity of punishment is always one which involves us as something less than persons, whether as punisher or punished' (Ramsey, 1969:223). Sin and judgement are fundamentally personal and relational and moral and have to do with the loss of fellowship with God. An understanding of atonement which pays attention to Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the way in which God overcomes the sin and evil of the world, will recognise that he does this by re-establishing, re-creating personal relationships between the world and himself at the very point where these break down most obviously. Jesus is given to the world as victim and given back to the world which put him to death as the forgiving Lord. It is this creation of new and fundamentally personal ways of relating to God through Jesus, in fellowship with him, which lies at the heart of a Christian understanding of atonement. This is the primary thought contained in the notion that on the cross God takes his own judgement upon himself, and bears away the consequences of our estrangement.

If the judgement of the cross means that God enters into the consequences of our fallenness, bears his own wrath, this thought leads quite naturally to the centrality of the theme of a radical divine identification with us in our plight in the theology of atonement. Identification and love belong together since the object of both is the renewal of relationships. MacKinnon (1967:181) singled out von Balthasar as the theologian who has given the most profound treatment of this theme which is most important for 'the sort of systematic reconstitution of the theology of atonement which is urgently required'. The intensity of von Balthasar's thought about Christ's identification with us emerges when he tells us that '(i)t is my God-forsakenness which is there in my sin, in my dying into remoteness from God and into the darkness to eternal death, that he experiences'. We shall need to return to this theme later in the chapter, particularly in relation to the problem of suffering in contemporary theology, and in chapter two when we discuss the theology of death and resurrection. For the present it is sufficient to note the central importance of this thought and yet also to suggest that by itself it is inadequate; it may be a necessary condition of a Christian soteriology but it can hardly be a sufficient condition. This is because hope is grounded not simply in the fact that God identifies with us in our sin, suffering and death. Rather it is possible to hope because in

identifying with us he redeems us from the power of these. Von Balthasar recognises the importance of this when he writes that God's sharing of our lostness in Jesus 'assists us precisely at that point where mere sharing our common humanity no longer helps: in the loneliness of death, of abandonment by God, of the fall into ultimate desolation' (1983:145, 173). Or as Barth (1956:229) expressed it: 'Even the strongest "with us" is not enough to describe what Jesus Christ is in relation to us'. Love gives us new possibilities and so goes beyond identification to transformation.

The Christian experience of salvation consequently has always been one of having something done for us. This language of 'for us' is to be found in the very earliest tradition (see Hengel, 1981:34-39, who discusses texts such as 1 Corinthians 15.3b, Mark 10.45, Romans 8.32, Galatians 1.4 and 2.20, Ephesians 5.2 and 25, Titus 2.14 and 1 Timothy 2.6). By entering into our lostness and transforming it in the costly identification of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God has acted on our behalf and borne the consequences of his own judgement. This raises the difficult questions of the legitimacy of speaking of Jesus' death as vicarious and substitutionary.

(c) Vicariousness and substitution

We are going to subject Pannenberg's use of the category of substitution to critical scrutiny. His work represents an important attempt to understand the vicariousness of Jesus's death and one which claims a broader basis in the way human society functions. As will become apparent, it is not clear that societal understandings do support his account. More importantly, we shall suggest that the use of the category of substitution is in danger of obscuring the notions of identification and transformation which are vital for a proper understanding of the foundations and practice of Christian hope.

It is certainly an important observation that much of our ordinary life depends upon a preparedness to live for others, to bear the costs of the actions of others, and to live in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Human life is constituted in such a way that vicariousness is the normal expression of, and the means of the restoration of, our essential interdependence. It is in this sense that Moberley (1978:141) says that '(w)e shall regard vicariousness as merely esoteric or even incomprehensible if we neglect to see that it is, in its many forms, the basic principle of all personal life'. The crucial significance of this anthropological observation for Pannenberg's treatment of the death of

Jesus can be seen in the following passage:

> If substitution is not a universal phenomenon in human social relationships, if the individualistic interpretation of responsibility and recompense need not be rejected as one-sided because it overlooks the social relationships of individual behavior, then it is not possible to speak meaningfully of a vicarious character of the fate of Jesus Christ. Substitution as such cannot be a miraculously supernatural uniqueness of Jesus.

Having accepted that modern society demonstrates the principle of substitution, Pannenberg states that '(i)n his death, Jesus bore the consequences of separation from God, the punishment for sin, not just in place of his people, but in place of all humanity'. This means that 'Jesus' death in its genuine sense is to be understood as vicarious penal suffering' (1968a:268, 269, 279).

Neie subjects Pannenberg's use of substitution to detailed criticism, noting that his 'explanations seem sketchy, general, and brief, and they are undocumented; they lack precision'. In particular, Pannenberg fails to pay attention to two crucial distinctions: 1. that between cause and effect and the moral area of guilt and its consequence. 2. that between sharing or participation in responsibility and guilt and the substitutionary or vicarious bearing in place of someone or something. In life there is much sharing of the consequences of guilt and responsibility, but vitally there is no bearing of guilt in place of others. 'In the area of responsibility and guilt there actually is no transference, in modern life'. This brings Neie to argue that 'Jesus' death can be construed only as the vicarious suffering of consequences of the sin of others, viz., of their closedness to Jesus' message, of man's universal self-enclosure toward God. Even this is only partially true'. Neither our experience of life nor the historical events of Jesus' ministry and death support Pannenberg's understanding of Jesus' death as a penal substitution. Neie puts forward his own alternative:

> Jesus' resurrection and its significance replaces the concept of God who judges <u>intra legem</u> by a concept of God who forgives. Its corollary, the conceptuality of expiation or satisfaction or penal suffering <u>pro nobis</u>, is replaced by the conceptuality of sacrificial love, of love to the point of

self-sacrifice unto death on our behalf (1978:193, 194, 197, 200).

There can be no doubt that Neie raises some weighty points against Pannenberg's theology of the atonement, and his remarks about whether the historical reconstruction of Jesus' life and death will bear the theological weight of the approach are a matter of more general concern, although it must also be pointed out that it is far from easy to see just how we can decide about this. Our discussion of double agency was only a pointer in this direction. Certainly it is most regrettable that Pannenberg should think in penal terms about the suffering and death of Jesus. Our earlier discussion tried to show that judgement and wrath are not to be mistaken for punishment. Pannenberg's account obscures the moral centre of atonement and makes the saving work of the cross too external in Macquarrie's sense of the word.

Neie is correct to lay the stress on participation and self-sacrificing love as opposed to substitution and punishment. The notion of substitution is not strictly speaking necessarily penal (Berkhof, 1979:304-305. Cf Morris, 1976:404-19 and Ladd, 1974a:427) and it may be that with care an acceptable statement of it can be given (see eg von Balthasar, 1983:150-53 and Juengel, 1983:367). But the notion of participation seems much better for two reasons. First, what is central to the Christian belief in atonement is much more clearly stated in terms of participation. The essence of the gospel is that through his participation in the lostness of human life and death, his complete self-offering in which he shares the judgement of God with us and for our sake, Christ overcomes our lostness by making a truly faithful response to God. Neie's account does not reckon fully with this confluence of love and judgement. The use of the category of substitution is in danger of removing us from our actual lostness - perhaps also projecting Christ forward into some coming definitive lostness - and may take our thought in quite the opposite direction to that of saving identification with us. If this is correct, substitution is not just a misleading way of presenting what Christ has done for us; it is the opposite of the participation and identification which lie at the heart of Christ's saving of the world. We suspect that substitution obscures the incarnational basis of soteriology. We cannot be saved by somehow disappearing from our lostness - as if we could vanish from the concrete human situations in which our lostness consists - in which Christ now stands in our place. Our only hope for salvation is that someone should come and share the lostness of our human life and death in

such a way that his (ie Christ's) life and death is a new departure which is no longer trapped in the old patterns of turning from God and the loss of human fellowship. The experience of the church is that because Christ shared his life and goes on sharing his life with us, we are not abandoned to all the consequences of our failures to respond properly to God and to each other, but rather we are enabled constantly to put our failures behind us and begin again on the task of being more human and faithful. This means that for the Christian understanding of hope through salvation incarnation, communion and transformation are key concepts which indicate the way in which the actual empirical situation of being human is transformed. The use of the category of substitution is in danger of idealising the historical drama of salvation. It does this <u>if</u> it suggests that we are displaced from the actual concrete human conditions of life in which our lostness is expressed, and that the judgement into which Christ enters is something other than the bearing of the consequences of his sharing our life (which transports his crucifixion into some other realm), and if it fails to stress that salvation must constantly take hold of the actual concrete conditions of human life. The truth which the idea of substitution may indicate is that Christ does something for the human condition which no one else could have done. But for the reasons given above, we still feel that this is better expressed by the ideas of participation, communion and transformation since these express what is crucial and obvious about the Christian experience of salvation ie that salvation is required and given through the achievement of Christ with us and not in our absence and in some other realm of judgement. If the idea of substitution is used it must not obscure the moral and realistic character of the foundations and practice of Christian hope in Christ's atoning work.

Second, the category of substitution may have damaging consequences for our view of Christian discipleship. It is true that by his death and resurrection Jesus saves us from the ultimate lostness of eternal death. However, the danger of the language of Jesus having suffered and died 'for us' slipping over into the language of his having suffered and died 'in place of us' is that it can all too easily suggest wrongly that there is no more place for suffering and dying Christians in the practice of hope. This overlooks the many unredeemed features of life and our place in bringing the life and death of Jesus into the world through our sharing in his ongoing self-giving. Participation expresses much better both Jesus' once and for all historical self-giving and our sharing in his continual self-giving for the world (cf Soelle, 1967 and Tillich, 1978b:173). The

fact that this total activity of Christ is a self-giving for us does mean that his work can be characterised as vicarious. In Neie's account vicariousness and substitution are taken to be too much of a piece and this leads to the rejection of both, whereas it would seem better to recognise that while substitution is not an essential category for the interpretation of Christ's work, vicariousness is.

Our discussion in this section has identified a number of key categories for a properly Christian understanding of the saving power of Jesus' death which is the basis of Christian hope. Of prime importance is the fact that it is the love of God which saves the world by giving itself. As the human embodiment of that love, Jesus' total self-giving in death shows that God gives himself without reserve for the sake of the world which he loves unconditionally. The fact that God saves us by coming to us in Jesus, by giving himself to us in Jesus, shows the fundamental importance of incarnation and identification for Christian soteriology. In Jesus, God enters into the lostness of the human situation and suffers his own judgement. The cross is the final sealing of the divine commitment to us and his willingness to bear the cost of the self-giving of love. Because it is God who encounters our lostness in Jesus, his human life is not simply another instance of our lostness, a sharing of his life with us in which he is finally overcome. The resurrection is the denial that this is what happened in Jesus. Although Jesus' commitment to us cost him his life, he re-fashioned our lostness so that the obedience of his life was sealed and reached its ultimate victory in his death. The theme of identification by itself is quite inadequate as an expression of what God does for the world in Jesus. There is hope for the world because in his coming to us, in his identification with us even in death, Jesus transforms the human situation. After his life, death and resurrection, the world is no longer the same. He makes it possible for us to live more humanly. In fellowship with him, we can live more for others and for God than for ourselves. His forgiveness frees people from being trapped in the mistakes of the past, and his love is the strength in which we can love more fully. Christian hope is therefore a profound hope because it is grounded in the love of God which overcomes our destructive self-centredness and which gives us the power to go on overcoming our own and the self-centredness of others. For the Christian community, 'hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us' (Romans 5.5).

iii The unfinished work of Jesus

The death of Jesus is the focal point of his saving of the world. However, it is impossible to make sense of his saving work without taking into account his continual self-giving throughout history and placing this in a trinitarian context. The saving of the world is a continual challenge and something which is still to be achieved, even though it is begun and promised irrevocably in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Therefore, the Christian hope for salvation must be understood in relation to Christ's ongoing presence in the Spirit, the community of the church in which his achievement is recognised, celebrated and offered to the world, eschatology and the practice of the faith which covers everything from prayer to politics.

(a) Grace, the Holy Spirit and the practice of the church

'With Christ's death of redemption the story of salvation has not ended, but just begun' (Weber, 1979b:63). Paul wrote that 'if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life' (Romans 5.10). Theologies of atonement must reflect the way in which salvation is actually experienced as an ongoing process, otherwise they make Christian claims that the world is saved in Christ open to serious misunderstanding.

The Christian hope is not sustained simply by Christ's death and resurrection in abstraction from the ongoing experience of salvation to which these events give rise. The appearances of the risen Jesus and the sending of the Spirit mean that the Christian experience of salvation is one of being continually renewed by the God who gives himself to the Christian community and to the world in Christ and the Spirit. Indeed, it is central to the meaning of resurrection that Christ is everlastingly alive, and that his self-giving has been vindicated by God as the way in which he saves and goes on saving the world. The Christian hope is grounded in God's saving action in Jesus' death and resurrection, but when we say this we must not forget that 'resurrection' indicates not simply a past event, but, because of that, an ongoing and irremovable presence.

If the Christian hope in God's salvation is to be understood properly it must be stressed in both its christological and pneumatological dimensions. This is recognised, for example, in the structure of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation which moves from 'The Obedience of the Son of God' to a discussion of 'The Holy Spirit and the Gathering of the Christian

Community' (1956:157-357 and 643-739). The work of salvation continues through the agency of the Spirit in both church and world. Although the practice of the church often makes this difficult to believe, at her best the church is the place where this activity of God is recognised for what it is and responded to. As Vanstone (1979:115) says, in the church 'the love of God is exposed to . . . the triumph of being recognised as love, [or] the tragedy of so passing unrecognised that the . . . gift of love itself, is never known'. The primary ecclesial context of salvation is an important reminder of the limitations of an abstract concentration upon the individual in matters of sin and redemption. Earlier we saw that the historical causes of Jesus' death point more to corporate failures than individual malice. As our failure is corporate, without denying the irreducible responsibility of each individual concerned, so also is our redemption. In the life of the church we discover that the remaking of our human existence is inextricably linked to our relations with each other. We experience salvation as we learn to live, share, worship, work, serve together. In this experience of community and fellowship God's grace reshapes our individual and communal life. The social context of salvation is absolutely necessary if we are to become more like Christ and die to self. It is wrong to think that we can be saved one by one since this overlooks 'the communal aspect which is part of the social reality of love' (Pittenger, 1985:451).

It is also important that the Christian understanding of salvation should not appear incredible because it seems to neglect the many unredeemed features of our world. Christ's saving work is not yet complete and this means that '(t)he mathematical point of the cross cannot bear the whole brunt of salvation, even though the atonement centers in the cross of Jesus' (Braaten, 1981:127). Thus Lash complains of

> . . . the insensitivity which Christians have often shown (both in practice, and in the absence of any perceptible <u>theoretical</u> pain or puzzlement) in face of the indubitable fact that human history, after the death of Jesus, continues to be a history of conflict, suffering and oppression - a history, in other words, of <u>un</u>redeemed humanity.

In this way Christians 'substitute a theory of reconciliation for its practice' and forget that 'the "work of our redemption" refers not merely to a deed once done . . . but also to tasks to be performed, in hope, in virtue of that deed' (1981:256, 257). If Christian claims for salvation

are to be credible they must not collapse God's saving action back into one single happening in the past in an idealist fashion. Rather the memory of Jesus' death and resurrection should keep Christian faith firmly aware of the harsh reality of a world in so many ways still unredeemed, yet also given hope because God has not abandoned it. In Jesus we see that God saves the world by a costly involvement in a human life. By their action or inaction, in fellowship or in rupture with him, Christians show whether they believe that his way does save the world.

The stress on the practice of Christian hope and our participation in Christ's ongoing work in the world is an important corrective to what may appear an overly ecclesiocentric account. It is true that the presence of Christ is recognised and responded to most self-consciously in the church, but the church exists for the sake of the world. If Christian hope is hope for the whole world, Christians must practise this hope through the various opportunities they have to shape the world in which they live. There is also a place for group action and action by the church as a whole. Christians should support any effort which leads to a more human and humane world. Taking seriously the world and its need for salvation will keep the Christian faith mindful of the complexities of the human predicament. The cross does show that the fundamental problem with men and women is their lack of love or the way in which that love is twisted in on itself, or its own group. The history of atonement theory preserves the Christian conviction that the fundamental problems of the world are moral. Unless we find ways of respecting, trusting, and valuing the dignity of others, and living with them in ways which are the concrete expression of the love which created us to live together, then there can be little hope for the world. But the way in which our several alienations from each other have come to be entrenched in the conditions of the world, and the efforts which are required to save us from this are far from straightforward. To be engaged in the world with hope for its improvement, for a partial contribution to its salvation, is so demanding that all the resources of the faith and the wisdom of the world must be employed if hope is not to be destroyed. It is because of the great importance of the practice of hope in the world, and the fact that faith has no easy answers, that we have devoted the final chapter of this thesis to a discussion of Christian hope and politics.

Paul tells the Christians in Rome that Jesus 'died to sin, once for all' (Romans 6.10). This once-for-allness of Jesus' death has always been important for Christian understanding (see Hengel, 1981:36-37), yet it is clear from what we said above that it requires careful interpretation.

Jesus' death may well be a turning point in the history of the world but it must not be taken by itself in isolation from the history which both goes before and follows his death (see eg Kaesemann, 1969a:74; Macquarrie, 1978b:313, 323; Tillich, 1978b:180). There is a reason which lies close to the heart of all atonement theology why this should be so. Wiles (1974:79) suggests that it is central to all theories that 'Christ's passion is in some way a demonstration of what is true of God's eternal nature'. A good example of this is Bushnell's doctrine that atonement is 'the travail of the ages, focussed once and for all in the vivid scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary, but for ever operating in the passion of the Holy Spirit to transform the world into the image of the Son of God' (Dillistone, 1968:246). If in his death Jesus shows us supremely what God is like, this must mean that God is the one who is always giving himself to and for the sake of the world. The once for all self-giving of Jesus is of a piece with this continual self-giving of God. In this context this is the significance of saying that Jesus is the embodiment of the mystery of God. As such Christ's once-for-all atonement is both the model for God's continuous saving activity and for the actions of Christians in the practice of hope (see further chapter 4).

However, a subtle trap may be laid if we are not careful in interpreting this vital conclusion of the confluence of christology and theology. The danger is that the interpretation of Jesus' death as the supreme revelation and instance of what God is doing throughout history may lead paradoxically to a dehistoricising of Christian faith in the failure to take seriously the fact that Jesus achieved something there, after which the world could never be the same. In other words, although the cross is continuous with all of God's activity towards the world it is also a decisive overcoming which had not taken place before, and only took place when Jesus came to his supreme hour. Unless this is grasped the radically historical path of God's salvation is undermined and for all its supposed concern with history faith becomes a form of idealism. For as MacKinnon (1979b:59, 60) points out against idealism, '(w)e have to resist the illusion of supposing that in history nothing ever really is done' since 'it is very hard to see how anything which we can continue significantly to call Christianity can survive the withdrawal of the predicate final from the work of Christ' which is 'an action that is complete in itself, that brings about in the very substance of the world irrevocable change'. In our attempt to do justice to both the constancy of God and Jesus' achievement we must be careful to avoid what McIntyre (1962:172) calls an insidious form of soteriological disengagement or non-involvement in which

on the cross nothing happens except that the constant love of God is revealed. As we have argued, the love of God is revealed on the cross, but it is revealed together with its achievement. It is the achievement of the love of God which is the basis of hope.

(b) The capacity of the story of Jesus to transform human existence

Transformation is the goal of God's saving involvement with us. As a final element in the theology of God's saving activity which we have been building up, we shall now consider the role the story of Jesus plays in re-shaping human existence, particularly as it is heard in the life of the church. We should stress that we do not think of story as a substitute for the history of Jesus. A realist commitment to history is absolutely fundamental for our understanding of Christian faith and hope. The story is invalid if it is detached from the history. Nevertheless the story of Jesus as told in the gospels has been remarkably effective in conveying the meaning and significance of Jesus' history. The story furnishes us with a new vision of ourselves, God and the world, and so makes a significant contribution to the ongoing task of changing the world in hope.

It is important to point out that the story of Jesus reshapes human life in a variety of ways. Its capacity to interrogate us and to give us a sense of how things could be different frequently relies upon its figurative or imaginative power which can open our hearts and eyes in a way which purely conceptual theology (for all its necessity and power) often fails to do. This can be seen also in the way that Christian art both represents and evokes Christian spirituality and discipleship. Weber's comment that '(s)uch artistic interpretations of the cross serve better than sermons to help us see the true significance of what happened that Friday noon' (1979a:vii) may be applied equally well to works of theology. Perhaps significantly, in the discussion of God's saving activity even the theology has a predominantly metaphorical character. If atonement is concerned with God's saving transformation of the human situation, and metaphor effects a transformation of meaning (Gunton, 1985a:132), it should not surprise us to find that Jesus' words and actions display a metaphorical character. Metaphor may be viewed as one instance of the general functioning of religious language which 'takes hold of certain images that are basic to our experience of life and extends their meaning so that they point to what is ultimate' (Wiles, 1982a:18). Jesus' use of parables is a classic example of this. However, since it is supremely in his death that Jesus embodies the mystery of God, it must be said that the transformation

of ordinary meaning which he brings about takes place even more in action than in words, and in a particularly striking and unexpected fashion. For Christian faith finds its hope in the fact that the political execution of a first century Jew is also the very life of God broken and given to the world in an act of forgiving, overcoming and renewing love. It would be difficult to dispute Wiles' claim that it is an action which 'has been remarkably effective as a historical phenomenon in the transformation of human lives' (1974:80).

In a later book he develops this thought of the transformative power of the passion by treating it as a parabolic event, 'the supreme example of parabolic speech about God . . . creative of a new situation and calling for response'. In particular it 'points the human imagination to a vision of God as participant in the continuing conflict with evil, identifying himself at whatever cost with both the perpetrators and the victims of that evil' (1982a:70, 72). This aspect of the vision of God to which Jesus' death gives rise is very important for the sustaining of hope in the face of some of life's harshest realities because it reassures us that we are not abandoned in our struggle against these. So long as God struggles with us our struggling cannot be in vain because it shares in the accomplishment of salvation. This sense of the hope which is brought to our plight through God's sharing it with us is particularly important for contemporary discussions of suffering as we shall see shortly. Wiles' comments stand in need of supplementation by an indication of what Jesus' death contributes to our understanding of being human. Three points of considerable importance for Christian hope may be suggested. First, the fact that Jesus was prepared to give his own life for us shows the value of human life in God's sight. Nothing can count against this inestimable value: no matter what depths the human race sinks to it will always possess this value for God and will never be given up to its own follies. Those who seek to preserve the possibility of a better human future should gain strength from this in that it shows that the intrinsic value of the human makes this a worthwhile duty. Second, Jesus' death shows the capacity of human beings to given themselves totally in order to make a better life possible for others, even others who may take our life from us. Hill (1984:222) suggests that it is humility which is 'the special, peculiar quality of love which was revealed and opened up to us' in Christ's humbling of himself unto death (cf Philippians 2.5-11). The fact that this is a genuinely human possibility gives great hope to the world since it shows that even in the worst of human situations there are likely to be individuals of considerable courage and fidelity who refuse to allow the

prospect of a better future to disappear. The resurrection is the promise that such sacrifice (and here we need not think just of loss of life pure and simple, but also loss of freedom, employment, home, family, friends, reputation, peace, privacy etc) is not in vain because it is aligned with the triumph of Christ's sacrifice. This, therefore, is the third point which Jesus' death suggests about the human, namely, that its capacity for sacrifice for the sake of others is not in vain, even if it may appear that way in the short run. History shows us that the evil corruption of human life cannot sustain itself and that justice and love eventually triumph. The expenditure, sometimes total, of so many who struggle for a better world is not in vain, even when they do not live to see the triumph which their self-giving has served to shape, and the hope for which they kept alive. The relevance of these points for some areas of the world today can scarcely be overstated.

If the passion of Jesus does transform the human situation by introducing new possibilities to the human imagination and achievement it has truly changed the world. This is because a world in which it is possible to be human in the way that Christian faith announces is not simply potentially but actually transformed. By the very fact that it contains these new possibilities through Christ's self-offering, it is now ontologically different. Compared to regarding 'our ontology as being defined by the list of things and types of things that there actually are . . . what is possible has an even more significant role to play in the definition of our world' (Sutherland, 1984:86). Christian hope does the world an important service by stubbornly insisting against cynicism and pessimism that the possibilities of the present situation are more hopeful than we fear. This is so important today given the enormity of some of the challenges we face and their capacity to make matters even worse by inducing paralysis.

In giving rise to the doctrine of the Trinity, the story of Jesus' death and resurrection provides another route to a distinctively Christian vision of human possibilities. This route shows that there is no rigid distinction between concept and metaphor and therefore qualifies our earlier remarks. The fact the mystery of God comes to human expression in Jesus suggests that here theology and anthropology can be thought together. Thus Jesus is not only the embodiment of God but also the embodiment of what it is to be human in relation to God (cf Schillebeeckx 1979:626-35). The vision of God which the story of Jesus gives rise to is that of God as Trinity. Theology and anthropology can be developed together in a particularly fruitful way from the doctrine of the Trinity, since they are bound

together in its history in sharing the notion of person. Thus in the differing social and psychological approaches of East and West there is an attempt to find some analogy between human life and the life of God. Hill (1984:215) even says that 'the authentic Christian doctrine of man . . . as a trinitarian image . . . presents us with a programme for Christian living'. He develops this in a discussion of Augustine but we prefer to think of the implications of the social model of the Trinity for Christian anthropology. The social model seems more appropriate because it holds together the individual and the social by stressing the essential sociality of being a person. By contrast, the psychological model is not so well suited to shape anthropology because it concentrates upon the inner subjectivity of a single individual without reference to the social context which is constitutive for the individual in human life.

In the history of the doctrine of the Trinity, attempts to understand human life and the being and action of God illuminate each other. It is notoriously difficult to know how much credence to give to our imaginative models. The triune life of God can only be hinted at through these, and so any clues to the kind of human community which could be in the image of God will be strictly limited. Nevertheless, we can suggest some simple but rather fundamental features of the trinitarian vision of being human to which Jesus' death and resurrection give rise. In this way the doctrine of the Trinity can be used to indicate the general direction of the change which Christian hope seeks to bring about in human relationships.

The fact that God is a 'social' Trinity in some sense suggests that personal existence is to be conceived of in relation to other persons. Just as in trinitarian theology the notion of perichoresis indicates that truly personal life consists in relationships of giving and receiving (see Kasper, 1984:285-90 and Moltmann, 1981:174-76), so the cultivation of the personal in human life must seek the fulfilment of the individual through the creation of community in which partnership, shared responsibility and a willingness to work for the best of others will be of prime importance. The significance of the doctrine of the Trinity for the highly individualised cultures of the modern Western world is well expressed by Torrance (1985:182. See throughout 160-206) when he states that a trinitarian notion of person 'excludes any notion of the person as an isolated individual whose essential movement is grounded on himself in the form of self-love, self-encounter, self-fulfilment, and so on'. We shall return to this in the discussion of politics in our final chapter. Thus in the doctrine of God we have found yet another reason why the redemption of human life should be seen in fundamentally social terms, and why hope

should be practised towards the creation of new human communities. The essential social relatedness of personal life suggests that 'the pattern of human life is to be one of reciprocity, self-emptying and mutuality - the kenotic life we were created for and are called to, in the image of the trinitarian God' (Moberley, 1978:3). The trinitarian notion of perichoresis indicates that personal existence is ecstatic, ie that we are to live in giving ourselves to each other rather than defensively and selfishly turning in upon ourselves. Here the gift of the Spirit to the community is particularly important '(s)ince he is the expression of the ecstasy of love in God' (Kasper, 1984:308).

These are various ways in which love exists in concrete. As such they suggest ways in which Christian hope can be expressed in action. In Jesus, and above all in his death, we see that it is the self-giving love of God which saves the world. In his life and death he not only embodies the mystery of God but also shows us what it is to be truly human. The doctrines of atonement and Trinity are absolutely united in their insistence that the divine love is the ground of the Christian hope of salvation, and the strength in which such hope is to be practised in the world.

iv Moltmann's 'crucified God': suffering as the test case for hope

Hope must not only come to terms with sin and evil. It must also come to terms with suffering and death. We shall return to the subject of death in chapter two. The suffering of God has become an increasingly important theme in contemporary theology, and '(t)he more the problem of suffering has come to be regarded as the most searching challenge to theistic faith, the greater the importance of this aspect of the passion has been felt to be' (Wiles, 1974:69). The work of Moltmann represents the most important attempt to think out a theology of the suffering God in the light of the cross. His inaugural lecture at the University of Tuebingen in 1968 on 'God and the Resurrection: Resurrection Faith in the Forum of the Question of Theodicy' (1971a) shows that he considers theodicy to be the main problem of theology today. For him, although atonement is central to the interpretation of Christ's death, '(t)he universal significance of the crucified Christ on Golgotha is only really comprehended through the theodicy question' (1981:52). We shall outline Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross and then we shall offer a critical reconstruction in order to advance the discussion. Moltmann is quite correct that the

identification of God with our suffering through Christ's passion lies at the heart of the hope which the Christian faith brings to the experiences of suffering. It is necessary to use reflection upon the cross 'to make the theology of hope more concrete, and to add the necessary power of resistance to the power of its visions to inspire to action' (1974b:5). However, there are certain key problems with his account which prevent him from speaking as powerfully and hopefully about God and suffering as the cross would otherwise allow.

(a) The task of faith and theology in the light of suffering

It is clear from some of Moltmann's autobiographical remarks that his experiences during World War 2 have shaped his theology powerfully. Thus he tells us that it was in the prison camps that 'the experience of misery and forsakeness and daily humiliation gradually built up into an experience of God'. He describes himself as 'a Christian for Christ's sake' because 'I found my desolation in him, and found God in my desolation. In him I found the power of a hope which I can believe, live and die with' (1980:7, 17-18). This corresponds closely with the opening page of The Crucified God. Speaking of the lectures on Reformation theology which he heard in Goettingen in 1948-49, Moltmann says:

> Shattered and broken, the survivors of my generation were then returning from camps and hospitals to the lecture room. A theology which did not speak of God in the sight of the one who was abandoned and crucified would have had nothing to say to us then.

This is the experiential background to the claim that '(a)ll Christian theology and all Christian life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died, ie the cry of dereliction of Mark 15.34, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'. The experience of abandonment which Moltmann underwent, and which he believes is present in suffering, raises the question of God, whether he exists, whether he loves us and is with us in our suffering, whether his righteousness will triumph. It is because the question is fundamentally about God himself that soteriology must not take precedence over theology. 'To take up the theology of the cross today is to go beyond the limits of the doctrine of salvation and to inquire into the revolution needed in the concept of God'. It is this theological concern which causes Moltmann to concentrate on the suffering

of God for his interpretation of the cross and not on atonement. Moreover, '(t)o restore Good Friday in all its horror and godlessness (Hegel) it is necessary for Christian faith first of all to abandon the traditional theories of salvation which have made the way the cross is spoken of in Christianity a mere habit' (1974b:1, 4, 33). Thus Moltmann regards atonement theory as potentially disabling for Christian theology because it may obscure the very harsh way in which Jesus' death poses the question of God, and together with the focussing of attention upon what the cross means for the world rather than for God himself, this may well frustrate the potential of Christian theology to articulate precisely the kind of involved, suffering God whom our world needs. Christian faith has the potential to bring real hope to the suffering of the world because it finds God in the sufferings of Christ. Likening suffering to an open wound which we bear in life, Moltmann states that '(i)t is the real task of faith and theology to make it possible for us to survive, to go on living, with this open wound' (1981:49). Theology can do this by developing a specifically Christian understanding of God. It is at this point that Moltmann's reception of the doctrine of the Trinity is important.

(b) His reception of the doctrine of the Trinity

In order to stress the fact that the Christian God is the one who suffers with us, Moltmann prefers to think in terms of 'the trinitarian history of God' rather than 'the Trinity' (see 1974b:274-78 and 1979h).

> The doctrine of the Trinity is not a speculation about the history of God *supra nos*, with which we would have nothing to do. It is nothing other than the shortened version of the history of Christ's passion, understood as 'the history of God' (1979g:74. Cf 1979h:82 and 1974b:246).

This does not mean that we are prohibited from 'pushing our question back from the starting-point of the history of God on the cross into the conditions of possibility for that history in God' (1979g:74), and indeed Moltmann has much to say about this in his later work *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross has much in common with the work of his Tuebingen colleagues Juengel and Kasper. The cross requires us to think of God as a differentiated unity of love between Father, Son and Spirit (see eg Juengel, 1983:368-73). In thinking about God in this way it is possible to bring together 'God' and 'cross' so that

we begin to understand both the being of God historically and the possibility of this history of God within his own eternal being. In so doing, a whole cluster of ideas such as love, suffering, self-differentiation, self-identification, self-limitation, kenosis, separation etc are brought together and seen in their essential inter-connectedness in the being and activity of God. This means that despite his preference for the 'trinitarian history of God', Moltmann relies heavily on concepts drawn from the doctrine of the Trinity for his understanding of this. His approach is really a plea that the doctrine of the Trinity be concerned essentially with the history of God's involvement with the world understood in terms of the focal events of Christ's passion.

The fact that 'God is love' (1 John 4.16) is the pre-condition of the possibility of the suffering and even dying of God. Love is essentially a giving of oneself to the other, and so for God to be love we must think of his being a dynamic unity of self-differentiation and self-identification since '(l)ove cannot be consummated by a solitary subject' (Moltmann, 1981:57; cf Juengel, 1983:363, 365, 368, 369; Kasper, 1984:299). This takes place eternally within the life of God in the communion of Father, Son and Spirit:

> When we say 'God is love', then we mean that he is in eternity this process of self-differentiation and self-identification; a process which contains the whole pain of the negative in itself (1981:57).

Here Moltmann suggests that there is already in eternity something like contradiction within God, and that this is the possibility of the historical contradiction of the passion. The fact that God is love means that he must be able and willing to suffer with and for us because it is of the essence of love to be involved with the other person in this way (Moltmann, 1974b:222. Cf 1981:60 and Juengel, 1983:373). To love is always to be open to the other person in such a way that we are no longer able to stay apart from the suffering which that person whom we love may experience.

In Moltmann's trinitarian theology of the cross we find a determined effort to think of Jesus' death as an event for God, indeed as the event of God, in which the categories of the phenomenology of love such as self-differentiation, self-limitation, separation and self-identification are allowed full play so that the suffering and death of Jesus reach deep within the life of God. As we have seen, it is only within this context of

the suffering of God that Christian faith has its supreme power and universal relevance for Moltmann. This is why it is so important to understand the cross as first and foremost something which God both does and suffers. Indeed, the confluence of God and suffering is so determinative for Moltmann's thought that we sometimes wonder if the suffering of the cross is the event of God himself.

In that case the doctrine of the Trinity really is, for Moltmann, 'nothing other than the shortened version of the history of Christ's passion'. In developing his theology of the cross it is clear that Moltmann has been greatly influenced by Luther and Barth in particular, whose work he seeks to make more radically theological and trinitarian. Moltmann recognises that Luther made a determined attempt to 'overcome the intellectual barrier against perceiving God in the death of Christ' by his use of the doctrine of communicatio idiomatum and his taking up of the phrase 'the crucified God'. This enabled him to 'conceive of God himself in the godforsakeness of Christ and to ascribe suffering and death on the cross to the divine-human person of Christ'. However, Moltmann argues that Luther never escaped fully from the early church's doctrine of two natures and failed to provide a sufficiently trinitarian understanding because 'he left out of account the relationships in which this suffering and dying person of the Son is involved with the persons of the Father and the Spirit' (1974b:47, 234, 235). Likewise Moltmann wishes to take up the attempt by Barth to speak of God suffering and dying upon the cross. Moltmann's desire to understand who God is and what he can do in the light of the cross and not in terms of axioms determined in advance is clearly a development of Barth's own position. Thus Juengel (1976b:84) points out that in his criticism of the traditional metaphysical axiom that God cannot suffer Barth's opposition to every form of natural theology received perhaps its most extreme formulation (cf Sobrino, 1978:221). Barth himself wrote:

> How the freedom of God is constituted, in what character He is the Creator and Lord of all things, distinct from and superior to them, in short, what is to be understood by 'Godhead', is something which - watchful against all imported ideas, ready to correct them and perhaps to let them be reversed and renewed in the most astonishing way - we must always learn from Jesus Christ (1956:129. Cf 177, 186).

Moltmann's debt to Barth, who 'has consistently drawn the harshness of the

cross into his concept of God', is acknowledged explicitly. Thus he warms to Barth's attempt to think historically about the being of God and to talk realistically of God's suffering. However, just as Moltmann considers Luther's theology of the cross to be insufficiently trinitarian in character, so he is critical of Barth's almost theopaschite understanding because it does not escape from the limitations of a simple concept of God. What is required is an exploration of the trinitarian character of the event of the cross in which Father, Son and Spirit are involved differently. In a trinitarian context we must speak of death <u>in</u> God rather than the death of God:

> There is a trinitarian solution to the paradox that God is 'dead' on the cross and yet is not dead, once one abandons the simple concept of God. Theopaschite talk of the 'death of God' can be a general metaphor, but on closer inspection it will not hold (1974b:203. Cf 1979g:64).

To speak properly of the suffering of God on the cross it is necessary to replace theopaschite language with the more differentiated language of patricompassionism in which the cross is an event between Father and Son. This is to perceive the cross in its radical theological depth by placing it within the life of the Trinity. The question of the relationship between the humanity and the divinity of Jesus must increasingly take a back seat if the cross is to be understood radically as an event between God the Father and God the Son (1979g:72-73. Cf 1974b:245).

(c) <u>Dereliction as a trinitarian event</u>

Given what we have said already about Moltmann's experience of finding hope in abandonment and the influence of this upon his theology, we should not be surprised to find that his theology of the suffering of God is essentially an attempt to locate Jesus' cry of dereliction within the life of God himself.

Moltmann's account of the crucifixion begins with an insistence that Jesus' death must be understood as a radical contradiction of his life and ministry. It would be difficult to understand why the cry of dereliction of Mark 15.34 should have been invented, and so we must 'start from the assumption that Jesus died with the signs and expressions of a profound abandonment by God'. For Moltmann, too many understandings of Jesus' death fail to bring out the theological character of Jesus' agony, the pain of

being abandoned by 'his God and Father, whose closeness and whose grace he himself had proclaimed'. The fact that Jesus 'died . . . ultimately because of his God and Father' means that the cross is something which took place 'between God and God'. Indeed, the abandonment of the Son by the Father must be seen as taking place within God himself, God forsaking himself, a stasis within God, even as 'enmity' between God and God, to the point of being 'God against God'. Moltmann does place single quotation marks around the use of 'enmity' and 'God against God' but even this reserve disappears quickly when he goes on to describe most forcefully the division which the cross introduces into the being of God:

> The cross of the Son divides God from God to the utmost degree of enmity and distinction. The resurrection of the Son abandoned by God unites God with God in the most intimate fellowship (1974b:147, 146, 149, 151, 152).

In this way even the resurrection emphasises the division within God because the death within God is overcome only by uniting God with God again.

To go beyond the essentially simple monotheism of the theopaschite formulations of the suffering of God it is necessary to distinguish in trinitarian terms the suffering of the Father from the suffering of the Son and the experience of dying from the experience of death. Jesus suffers a dying in forsakenness but not death itself for only those who are alive can suffer. The Father who abandons and delivers Jesus up suffers the death of his Son in an infinite grief which takes place in the very core of God's being as love. So there is in the life of God the suffering of Jesus in his dying and separation from his Father, and the suffering which the Father endures in giving his Son up to death. His suffering is all the more because of the infinite love with which he loves the Son. Suffering and death bring about a profound transformation in the very being of God because '(t)he Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father . . . [who] suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son'. The giving up of the Son by the Father is matched by the self-giving of the Son. This is most important because it is this deep unity of love and will (a homoousion) between Father and Son which sustains the division, separation and abandonment of the cross. 'In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender'. We must think of the cross as a community in separation and a separation in community. In the light

of the cross, Christians confess that God is love. 'He constitutes his existence in the event of his love. He exists as love in the event of the cross' (1974b:243, 244).

In the death of Jesus, God shares the Godforsakenness of the world in order to put an end to it.

> Only if all disaster, forsakenness by God, absolute death, the infinite curse of damnation and sinking into nothingness is in God himself, is community with this God eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election and divine life. The 'bifurcation' in God must contain the whole uproar of history within itself. Men must be able to recognize rejection, the curse and final nothingness in it . . . The concrete 'history of God' in the death of Jesus on the cross on Golgotha therefore contains within itself all the depths and abysses of human history and therefore can be understood as the history of history . . . There is no suffering which in this history of God is not God's suffering; no death which has not been God's death in the history on Golgotha.

The Father delivers up the Son so that by identifying with our forsakenness and placing it within the eternal love of the Trinity it might be overcome. This shows that Moltmann's concern for the doctrine of God and for what the cross means for God is not the exclusion of soteriology, which some of his comments, already narrated, might suggest, but rather the articulation of an understanding of God which is made necessary by his particular understanding of our situation and how we can be saved from it. His theology is driven as much as any other by soteriological considerations. What he has tried to do is to reflect as deeply as possible upon the implications of his soteriology for the inner being of the triune God in relation to Jesus' cry of dereliction. This is what he believes previous theologies of the cross have failed to do with a consequent impoverishment of both soteriology and theology. It is also clear that Moltmann has used the theme of the suffering of God as the context in which to take up traditional topics such as the wrath and judgement of God. Thus, Christ was delivered up into the Godforsakenness of the situation into which God gives men and women up in his judgement and wrath. 'Judgment lies in the fact that God delivers men up to the corruption which they themselves have chosen and abandons them in their forsakenness'. Here Moltmann is commenting upon Paul's teaching in Romans 1.18 onwards. In the death of

Jesus, 'God overcomes himself, God passes judgment on himself, God takes the judgment on the sin of man upon himself'. (Although he does not mention Barth's treatment of 'The Judge Judged in Our Place', it is difficult to believe that Moltmann does not have this in mind.) Godforsakenness therefore means both the situation into which we are delivered and the delivering up of Christ into our situation in order to save us. Therefore, in Moltmann's thought it does not mean the absence of God. Rather it indicates the extent of his identification with us almost to the point of tearing the very being of God asunder. In our godforsakenness we are threatened by a profound loss of meaning in our lives; this is also the theological meaning of godforsakenness. 'In a situation of godforsakenness and senselessness the knowledge of the hidden presence of God in the godforsaken Christ on the cross already gives "courage to be", despite nothingness and all annihilating experiences' (1974b:246, 242, 193, 192, 335).

Since the publication of The Crucified God Moltmann has stated the extent to which the very being of God is threatened by the cross with increasing boldness. (Typically, the cross is also the very fulfilment of the God who is love, and who exists as love supremely in the event of the cross.) In The Crucified God, as we have seen, Moltmann speaks of the cross making a division within God where there is 'the utmost degree of enmity and distinction' and the loss of Fatherhood and Sonship. By the time we come to his essay on 'The Theology of the Cross Today' in The Future of Creation, we find that he speaks of 'dichotomy' and 'cleavage' within God, and of the Son dying from the Father's curse. 'On the cross Jesus and his God and Father are divided as deeply as possible through an accursed death, and yet they are most deeply one through their surrender' (1979g:64, 65, 73). In The Trinity and the Kingdom of God Moltmann pushes the realism of the suffering and death within God to the very limits so that his trinitarianism appears to collapse under the stress of the cross. He sees great significance in the fact that on the cross Jesus no longer addresses God as 'Abba':

> If we take the relinquishment of the Father's name in Jesus' death cry seriously, then this is even the breakdown of the relationship that constitutes the very life of the Trinity: if the Father forsakes the Son, the Son does not merely lose his sonship. The Father loses his fatherhood as well. The love that binds the one to the other is transformed into a dividing curse.

The intense realism of Moltmann's account is confirmed when he tells us that '(h)ere the innermost life of the Trinity is at stake' and that '(w)hat happens on Golgotha reaches into the innermost depths of the Godhead, putting its impress on the trinitarian life in eternity'. In the fiercely dialectical way in which so much of his thought works, Moltmann offers the typical yet perplexing interpretation:

> On the cross the Father and Son are so deeply separated that their relationship breaks off. Jesus died 'without God' - godlessly. Yet on the cross the Father and the Son are at the same time so much one that they represent a single surrendering movement.

The division within unity can even be expressed by saying that the Father is 'crucifying love' and the Son 'crucified love'. It is only the Spirit who keeps the being of God from disintegrating since he is 'the link in the separation'. Indeed, it is through the Spirit that the double surrender of Father and Son takes place (1981:80, 81, 82, 83). It is not easy to see just how Moltmann understands the Spirit in relation to the double suffering of Father and Son since, in addition to what we have just said, he also believes that the Spirit actually proceeds from the event which takes place between Father and Son on the cross (1974b:244). Indeed, the procession of the Spirit has its very source in the derelictio Jesu (1979g:74). If this is the case, it would appear that the separation and division, even enmity and breakdown, which enters the midst of the life of God, somehow contains within itself, within its own inner dynamics, the power to generate an even greater unity in the midst of rupture. In this way, not only does Moltmann's God enter with utmost seriousness into suffering and death, but the suffering and death and its impact upon the life of God becomes itself the means of its own undoing. This is because the very dereliction becomes the source of the Spirit who unites Father and Son and brings resurrection out of death.

(v) A critical reconstruction

It is not at all easy to do justice to Moltmann's thought. When we consider the extent to which he has stimulated discussion of the doctrine of God, it is hard to deny MacKinnon's description of The Crucified God as

'seminal' (1980:171). There can be no doubt that he has made a major contribution to trinitarian thinking and practice. He shows an admirable concern with human suffering and a determination to understand who God is precisely at the point where, paradoxically, faith finds God, namely, in the death of Jesus. It is difficult to interpret and criticise Moltmann with confidence because he has written so much and his thought is so diverse and complex. At times it is so dialectical that it appears to tumble over into flat incoherence, and it certainly lacks conceptual clarity at a number of points. There is quite considerable literature available on the thesis of 'the crucified God' (see eg Attfield, 1977; Bauckham, 1977; Brinkmann, 1975; Hunsinger, 1973; McWilliams, 1979 and 1980; Meeks, 1974; Morse, 1979; Scott, 1978; Welker, 1979). In this section, we shall try to give a more careful account of the suffering of God by developing just a few criticisms which seem to be of greatest importance.

(a) The suffering of God must take place in our history where it is needed

The sense that it is only possible to believe in God if he truly identifies and shares with us in our suffering is present powerfully in Moltmann's thesis of 'the crucified God'. In this we believe the instincts of much contemporary theology to be sound. Moreover, the hope which faith brings to suffering is concerned above all with God's relationship to our suffering in the light of his identification with the suffering of Jesus on the cross. However, there are several problemmatic features in Moltmann's understanding of God's identification with our suffering. Moltmann sets out with the intention of understanding the being of God in terms of the history in which Jesus' death stands at the centre. In his insistence that the cross must be seen in terms of what it means for God himself, he talks of the suffering and death being in God and so the crucifixion is driven into the centre of the inner life of the Trinity with an apparently intense realism. Unfortunately, the intended realism threatens to become a form of idealism in the disappearance of the human and history into the life of God. It becomes increasingly difficult to see that Moltmann takes seriously the specific historical experience of Jesus' human suffering and indeed more generally the great variety of specific human experiences which are lumped together under the generic use of 'suffering'.

This can be seen in a number of ways. In order to develop a trinitarian theology of the cross, Moltmann thinks of Jesus' suffering and death as being an event 'between God and God'. This must take precedence over

previous discussions of the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Jesus. We must think of the whole person of Christ in relationship with the Father and the Spirit. In itself this is a good proposal. However, the more Moltmann's account proceeds in terms of something which takes place 'between God and God' and in the midst of the life of the Trinity, the more difficult it becomes to see that this is a doctrine of God grounded in the particular, historical suffering and death of Jesus. The humanity of Jesus seems to disappear from view. Soelle (1979:116) appears to have this in mind when she speaks scathingly of Moltmann's trinitarian scheme making us only function as puppets, and perhaps too starkly, she insists that Christ did not die in God but rather dies today in us:

> Das Unfruchtbare des trinitärischen Schemas, das auch dort geschlossen bleibt, wo es sich heilsoekonomisch formuliert, ist, dass wir in ihm nicht erscheinen oder nur als Marionetten fungieren . . . Gegen Moltmann ist festzuhalten: Christus starb nicht an Gott, sondern er stirbt - heute - an uns.

The suspicion that we are being taken away from the particular historical sufferings of Jesus grows when we find Moltmann describing Golgotha as an event which contains all suffering and death in itself. Presumably this is why he refers to the cross as 'the history of history'. This is an idealist construction of Jesus' suffering which cannot possibly bear the weight of this claim. It also fails to recognise the independent and very different histories of suffering experienced by other human beings. The soteriological concern of Moltmann's theology of the suffering God is apparent when he tells us that '(m)en must be able to recognise rejection, the curse and final nothingness' in the 'bifurcation' in God on Golgotha. What he fails to explore is the possibility of finding all suffering, death etc in God on the basis of Golgotha without the necessity of locating all of this in the particular suffering and death of Jesus. This is what is required to bring hope to suffering. Given the closeness of Jesus' relationship with God, his death probably did contain a special agony as Moltmann detects in the cry of dereliction. But it would be very difficult indeed to claim that Jesus suffered the most in history, let alone that he took all suffering and death to himself (see eg Barth, 1956:245-47, 271; Lampe, 1956:112-13; Moltmann, 1981:76; Sobrino, 1978:217, thesis 10 contra 224, thesis 13; Soelle, 1975:81). The fact that the special quality of Jesus' suffering stems from his relationship with his Father shows that

suffering is not a generic phenomenon but exists in many varieties. Wiles (1974:72) puts the matter much more satisfactorily than Moltmann:

> Suffering is not some single entity in which different people share. There is my suffering and your suffering - and they are of many kinds. If the eternal drank of the chalice in the sufferings of the passion, in how direct a sense is that the same chalice as the one drunk by the mother of a brain-damaged child or the chance victim of a psychopathic assault? The suffering in which the eternal Word shares directly can only be a sacramental representation of his self-identification with the suffering of other individuals. The self-identification itself must be of a different order (cf Ward, 1982b:198-99).

In other words, the cross shows us that God identifies with us in our suffering. It is the focal point, 'the sacramental representation', at which this identification becomes known and most savingly effective. But God's identification with suffering goes beyond Golgotha. He identifies with all human suffering and death by entering into all suffering and death wherever and whenever it is found. In this way, all suffering and death can be found in the God of Golgotha but not in Golgotha itself. This is all that we need to say, and putting the matter this way avoids the impossibility of treating Golgotha as an event which includes all other events within itself. Moltmann's theology has the potential to develop in this direction because he talks not only of 'history in God' but also of 'God in history'. The latter is not given enough importance. Insofar as the totality of history tends to be reduced to the one historical point of the crucifixion, and even that tends to lose its historical finite human character by disappearing into the life of God, Moltmann's original concern for a realism about history and God, in which the 'doctrine of the Trinity is not a speculation about the history of God <u>supra nos</u>', is subtly undermined. In thinking of the cross as <u>the</u> event of God's being, we may even wonder if eternity itself has contracted so that the 'history of God' becomes the one event of Jesus' suffering and death. Clearly, Moltmann does not intend this, but he does not dispel this impression by his failure to articulate clearly how he wishes to relate God's eternity to the 'trinitarian history of God' and how this notion is related to the history of the world. His theology seems to presuppose something like the

philosophical interpretation of God's eternity which Swinburne (1977b: 210-29; cf Ward, 1982b:149-70) provides, but Moltmann rarely enters into the philosophical discussion which is required.

The lesson from Moltmann's treatment of God's identification with all suffering is that this must be understood in such a way that it remains clear that we are taking the specific, concrete suffering of Jesus seriously, and by extension the suffering of others seriously. The profoundest response which the Christian faith can make to suffering is to insist that nobody is ever left to suffer alone or without hope precisely because Jesus suffered and yet was not abandoned by God (we shall see shortly that another problem with Moltmann's theology is his treatment of the theme of abandonment). Indeed, ultimately the Christian hope is that no matter how much we suffer God's purposes for us will be fulfilled in his good time. His love triumphs over suffering and has the last word about our future; this is the meaning of resurrection in the context of suffering. The hope brought to those who suffer is not simply to be announced, as if it was enough to tell those who lie ill or whose lives are barely tolerable because of other difficulties that God shares their suffering. This by itself is not a faithful response to the gospel because this is not how God shares in our suffering. His sharing our suffering is not merely verbal, but takes the form of the word made flesh. Therefore, the hope which the cross brings to suffering can be conveyed appropriately only if it is primarily a matter of actions, of actually being with people and making their burdens easier, and much less a matter of words which can be spoken all too easily. Words of comfort and hope <u>are</u> important but they need to be spoken in the proper context of an involved and committed relationship to their hearers. By their actions, Christians can help those who suffer to see that, as it were, God's words to them are <u>not</u> spoken from a situation of non-involvement. So two things are very necessary to bring hope to suffering: 1. to be able to trust that <u>God</u> shares our suffering with us. 2. to be confident that <u>our</u> suffering is being taken seriously. The crucifixion shows both. Unfortunately, Moltmann's interpretation of it does not convince us that he really takes seriously both Jesus' human suffering and the suffering of others. At times we wonder if his talk of 'all suffering' is connected to the history in which men and women suffer at all. In this way the hope which Moltmann wishes to bring to suffering is robbed of its power because we cannot be given hope in our suffering, no matter how powerful the theology at times, if we are not convinced that <u>our</u> suffering is being taken seriously. No amount of talk about God and the cross can compensate for this. The consequences of his driving the

crucifixion back into the life of God are quite different from those which Moltmann intends. They are a serious warning that attempts to think about God in a realistic historical fashion must make sure that the history in which such theological realism is grounded does not disappear under the pressure to see what happens as happening in the life of God. If that history is not preserved in all the rawness and concreteness of its humanity, the power of the theological insights will be unconvincing in the final analysis. This is the last thing which Moltmann himself would wish to happen. By finding hope in the cross as the sacrament of God's sharing in suffering wherever and whenever it is found, it is possible to harness the genuine power of his writing about God and bring a convincing hope to those who suffer by speaking and acting faithfully in relation to God's suffering and their situation.

(b) The victory of God's love as the basis of hope must not be obscured by the use of the themes of contradiction and breakdown

Moltmann's desire to bring hope to suffering through the theology of 'the crucified God' is threatened also by his interpretation of Jesus' cry of dereliction. This obscures the fact that it is the love of God which comes to us in our suffering by introducing an ambiguous quality to it. Moreover, at times his language suggests that the very being of God collapsed upon the cross. If this did happen, the very bedrock of Christian faith and hope, and the promise of victory in suffering, would turn out to be illusory.

Moltmann's language of 'breakdown' actually suggests that the triune life of God collapsed through the Son's death. Thus we noted that 'Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender', and that although 'their relationship breaks off . . . [they] are at the same time so much one that they represent a single surrendering movement'. To think of God and the death of Jesus as being so inextricably linked up with each other as faith affirms does push human thought to the limits of its comprehension. Christian theology recognises this and is sometimes forced to use the most paradoxical expressions in order to be true to its own subject matter. However, Moltmann seems to verge on flat incoherence when he uses ideas which appear to be mutually exclusive. For example, if the Father and Son do remain deeply united in their surrender, then surely this must mean that their relationship continues, and it must qualify the sense in which the language of separation and abandonment is used. It is difficult to avoid

the conclusion that Moltmann simply has not faced up to the logical incoherences of his account. The dialectical nature of his theology undoubtedly owes much to Hegel's speculative Good Friday and his own experience of finding God in his abandonment. This explains the centrality of the theme of contradiction and the resolution which arises out of it. Most interestingly, a recent German study of Moltmann's thought accuses him of transforming the theology of the cross into a 'philosophy of the cross' (see Roberts, 1985:106). Although he is seeking to understand the cross on its own terms, it seems as if Moltmann has imported the controlling concepts of alienation and contradiction. Fiorenza (1974:74) comments that we can interpret 'the cross as an inter-trinitarian event, as an event in Moltmann's words of "God against God" [only] if one reads into the New Testament a heterogeneous speculative view of the Trinity'. This distorts his reading of the cross and seriously weakens the power of his theology to articulate an understanding of God as suffering and triumphant love.

The incoherence of his account flows over into a basically non-trinitarian doctrine of God when he combines the language of love with that of the enmity and division within God on the cross. The use of phrases such as 'God against God' subverts profoundly his intended trinitarianism. Moltmann has been inspired to think in terms of the suffering of God by Barth's work, but although Barth saw the temptation to talk of contradiction and conflict in God himself, he rejected this firmly (Juengel, 1976b:84). The theopaschite language which Moltmann criticises is insufficiently trinitarian but at least it preserves the unity of God. His use of division and opposition within God, seen very clearly in the stress on the accursed death of the Son and in the juxtaposition of the Father as 'crucifying love' and the Son as 'crucified love', works in the opposite direction to the doctrine of the Trinity. As we saw in our discussion of atonement, the doctrine of the Trinity rules out the possibility that there could be any opposition between the love of the Father and the love of the Son. This is why contractual theories founder on the doctrine of the Trinity (see Rashdall, 1919:446. Cf Clark, 1957:225). The charge made by Soelle that Moltmann really puts forward a doctrine of the sadistic crucifying God who alternates between being a hangman and a miracle worker (1975:26-27; 1979:117) is harshly one-sided, but it does point to the incoherence of his thought and its possible dangers. Moltmann does want to see the cross as a unity of love between Father and Son in their double surrender. However, this is obscured by the introduction of ideas which are the opposite. Moreover, it is not clear just what happens to the love of God on the cross. Thus, he says that '(t)he love that binds the one to

the other is transformed into a dividing curse'. Does this mean that the love of Father and Son is overcome and ceases to be love, in which case, the God who is love, must cease to be God? If this is the case, on his own terms, Moltmann's theology collapses completely. He does not seem to be aware of this problem. In private conversation, he has defended his approach by saying that he is only trying to take the Godforsakenness of the cross seriously into his doctrine of God. While it may be true that theologies of the cross often fight shy of this, it must surely be the case that we need to find ways of speaking about the participation of Father, Son and Spirit in the suffering of Jesus such that the centrality of the divine self-giving love is not compromised in any way.

It is central to the hope which the Christian faith brings to suffering that we are not abandoned by God but held safe in the grasp of his love (see eg Romans 8.38-39). Moltmann's interpretation of the cross makes it difficult to see how Jesus' suffering and death is the basis of this conviction. One very obvious feature of his account is the fact that for him Jesus is abandoned by God. To be sure, the cry of dereliction must be taken seriously as a real cry from the abandonment felt by Jesus. If Jesus did not cry out like this, his death would lose the power which it does possess quite directly to bring hope to those who cry out from the various experiences of abandonment which men and women suffer. This is an important consideration for Moltmann. However, it would be difficult to see what hope could be found for our experiences of abandonment from the situation of Jesus if we really believed that he was abandoned by God. If this was so then the cross would be a confirmation of our sense of abandonment. It is because faith believes that Jesus was not abandoned by God that it can say with confidence that nobody is ever abandoned by God. Although Moltmann does not equate abandonment with the absence of God, and thinks more in terms of God bearing his own judgement, he cannot dispel entirely the impression that God did 'turn his back' upon Jesus. Indeed, it may be wondered if 'abandonment' really is a wise category to use for God's relationship to Jesus in the theology of the cross, given the way in which the word functions in non-theological contexts.

The suspicion that Moltmann undermines our ability to trust in God and especially in his love is confirmed when we see the ambiguity, tension, and flat contradiction which he introduces to the love of the Trinity. It is not possible to continue trusting in the love of God with the assurance which the gospel announces if we are told that the Father is crucifying love. A proper understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is so essential to hope because it removes any ambiguity or uncertainty from the

fact that the presence in whom we trust is that of a gracious self-giving love. The tension in Moltmann's thought about the love of God eventually reaches breaking point and so buries all hope. It is far from clear how resurrection can emerge from the collapse of the inner life of God. We shall return to this in chapter two.

These criticisms of Moltmann have been put strongly in order to highlight the implications of his theology for pastoral practice. It is a pity that Moltmann has not offered a more careful and coherent account because, despite what Soelle claims, it is the self-giving love of God which stands at the heart of his theology.

(c) The totality of the suffering of God from the perspective of the suffering of the Spirit

Although Moltmann speaks of the cross in terms of the Father who suffers the death of the Son and the Son who suffers dying, he says little of the suffering of the Spirit. Neie (1978:222, 223) criticises Pannenberg for failing to indicate 'the participation of the Father in the passion of the Son which Hegel's concepts of reciprocal self-dedication of the Persons of the trinity . . . does open up':

> To say, then, that God suffers on the cross means that the Persons of the trinity participate in Jesus' passion on the cross - as in all suffering of all creatures on all crosses.

Yet again the passion of the Spirit is not really taken seriously, because the point is not developed in this direction. The important trinitarian notion of perichoresis should alert us to the fact that, for example, the Son who suffers can only be understood if his suffering is related to both Father and Spirit since he exists always in relation to the other persons in God.

Perhaps it is in the area of pneumatology that Moltmann's theology of the 'crucified God' is most under-developed (Newlands, 1975:149). Just as Pannenberg is reluctant to speak of the Father's sharing in the passion of the Son because it is Jesus' passion which is historically visible (Neie, 1978:222), so there is a genuine hiddenness about the Spirit which makes it difficult to speak of his suffering. This undoubtedly explains why the theology of the suffering of God is so overwhelmingly christological. If it is on the cross that God's suffering is most clearly seen in the death of the Son, then the major stress should be christological and it is perhaps wise to preserve a certain reticence about the Father and the Spirit without denying their involvement also. But if we are to think of

God's suffering as being truly trinitarian because he is such in his innermost being, then we must try to give some indication of the different sufferings of Father, Son and Spirit. Moreover, although there is a certain hiddenness of the Spirit, there are good reasons for thinking that if christology is the focal context for a theology of the suffering of God, nevertheless pneumatology is the overall unifying context.

The pneumatological dimension to God's suffering requires much further discussion. Moltmann is not alone is his relatively under-developed doctrine of the Spirit; it is realised increasingly today that pneumatology is the neglected third term of trinitarian theology, and that perhaps the key to a reinvigorated Christian theology lies here (see eg in different ways, Kasper, 1984:198-200; Wiles, 1982a:117-29; Mackey, 1983:208). If the Spirit is ekstasis within God, the one through whom the life of God goes out of itself, creates the world, and relates himself to that world, and even, in the story of the passion, relates himself to himself through death, then the case for considering pneumatology as the overall context for a theology of God's suffering is strong indeed.

We can give a brief indication of the potential of pneumatology to supply an integrated unity to the theology of the suffering of God which recognises that it is not simply monochrome but rather intensifies as his commitment to the world unfolds over time. In trinitarian theology the Spirit is the ekstasis within God, and as such he is the precondition within the life of God of all of God's works ad extra. It is therefore significant that at creation it is the Spirit of God which 'was moving over the face of the waters' (Genesis 1.2). In creation God gives life to that which is other than himself. This is very important for the theology of the suffering of God for, as Macquarrie (1978c:4) suggests, the act of creating the world is somewhat like the creating of a picture in which the artist puts something of himself. The fact of creation means that God opens himself up to the suffering which all true love experiences because it is deeply concerned about what happens to what or to whom it loves. For all true love, and certainly for God, this is not a matter of mere observation but rather of deep participation and sharing. Mackey (1983:261) writes:

> At creation itself death enters into God's necessary experience, the death of loved ones. The passion that is at the heart of the world, focussed in the death of the most insignificant mite, celebrated in the invocatory memorial of the death of Jesus, is, as much as Moltmann could ever wish, the passion of God. And a properly construed Christian

creation-story would make that clear.

While this is an important corrective to any treatment of the suffering of God which is concentrated too exclusively upon the cross, it can scarcely be denied that it is because of the cross that Christians have a vision of God which leads them to see his sharing in suffering throughout creation. Moreover, the coming of Jesus into the world raises to a new height the intimacy and costliness of God's involvement with creation. Incarnation and passion intensify God's participation in the suffering of the world. Although God is not bound by the temporal limitations of human existence, it is difficult to do justice to the realism of the gospel unless we think of there being some kind of temporality in God. Without this it becomes impossible to understand the death and resurrection of Jesus as a temporal interruption in the life of God with the realism which is required if his story is also the story of God. The biblical story does not suggest naturally a timeless interpretation of God's eternity but rather one in which he is 'both backwardly and forwardly eternal', ie that he has always existed and will always exist (Swinburne, 1977:211; cf 218 and Davies, 1982:84). If Jesus is the final and complete expression of God's sharing in suffering, we must think of his passion being the final outworking of God's desire to share the suffering of his creation. It is not really possible to think that this brings nothing new for God if we pay attention to the harshness of the cry of dereliction and the new departure of the resurrection. Christian theology has always understood that with Jesus' crucifixion a special agony entered the life of God, and that with his resurrection a new beginning was created for the world. This involves God deeply as the loving creator of the world. For various reasons theolgy was not always able to think through the significance of this for its understanding of God and temporality, but today it is scarcely tenable that we could think in any other terms than that Jesus' death and resurrection did make a profound difference for God himself. In other words: 'The Father has become different through his surrender of the Son, and the Son too has become different through the experience of his passion in the world' (Moltmann, 1979h:93). This means that there must be some sort of 'before' and 'after' in God's experience of the world.

Just as it is the Spirit who leads God out of himself into the new experience of creation, so it is the Spirit who leads God into the new experience of incarnation. Thus, whatever we may decide about the historical status of the tradition of the Virgin Birth, it is true that Jesus is pictured in the gospels as the one who is full of God's Spirit and

experience of creation, so it is the Spirit who leads God into the new experience of incarnation. Thus, whatever we may decide about the historical status of the tradition of the Virgin Birth, it is true that Jesus is pictured in the gospels as the one who is full of God's Spirit and led by the Spirit at all the vital stages of his career, none more so than his passion (see Kasper, 1984:243-49 and Moltmann, 1981:61-96). The suffering and death of Jesus are not merely the supreme venturing forth of the Son as a too exclusively christocentric interpretation of the passion may suggest. The cross is also the supreme going forth of the Spirit since it is the facility of the Spirit to take God out of himself and this is required supremely when God gives himself over to death, the opposite of his own divine life, when Jesus dies. Insofar as the Father gives of his very own being to the Son, he too shares in the outgoing of the passion, and in giving his Son over to death he gives up something of himself. The more we stress the outgoing of the passion the more we can appreciate the fact that the passion really does impinge itself upon the inner life of God.

The Spirit not only sustains the triune self-giving of the passion but also brings it to its successful outcome in the triumph of the resurrection. Through the Spirit, the creative power of the Father raised the Son from the dead. This is the promise of the final overcoming of all suffering and death, and the demonstration that the self-giving which the Spirit makes possible is the way of God's redemptive sharing in suffering. The resurrection, then, does not bring this to an end. Rather, the Christian community is given the gift of the Spirit so that it may share in God's suffering with and for the world, and become the ongoing human expression of the love and hope which he gives to the world. In transforming suffering through creative and costly involvement the Christian community can help the world to believe that the coming of Jesus is its true hope, and the gift of the Spirit the beginning and pledge of a final transformation in which all things shall be renewed (see eg Ephesians 1.13-14 and 2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5).

These reflections show how a greater use of the doctrine of the Spirit might enable us to develop a more integrated theology of the suffering of God in which the central and normative suffering of Jesus' passion could be related intrinsically to the rest of the totality of God's sharing in suffering, and to the role of the church in sharing the suffering of others. The Spirit brings hope to our suffering by being both the commitment of God to us and the creativity which he exercises in his sharing in our suffering. By thinking in terms of the <u>history</u> of God's

sharing in our suffering - rather than atemporal formulations of God's being and actions - we have been able to stress that God shares in our suffering. In relation to the suffering of people, simply speaking of God's sharing in suffering is not enough to bring hope. Men and women need to be able to believe that it is their suffering which is being taken seriously, shared and redeemed. This is why it is so essential that the God in whom people are asked to trust should be involved, and be seen to be involved, in the harsh realities of the suffering which is involved in human life. The fact that Christian hope is taken back time and time again to the death of Jesus is a reminder of its responsibility to those who suffer, and reason to believe that the hope it offers is neither facile nor in vain.

(d) We can try to say too much and too little about the suffering of God

Moltmann's attempt to re-think the doctrine of God in the context of the suffering of the cross correctly recognises that the true depth of the hope which Christian faith brings to suffering can only be understood in relation to God. Christian hope is trust in God. It is therefore very important to say something about this God in whom we are invited to hope.

However, many reviewers have expressed doubts about the ambitious confidence which Moltmann displays in his writing about the trinitarian character of the event of the cross and about the immanent life of the Trinity. Thus his account of the dereliction of the cross both from the side of the Father and from the side of the Son is certainly a rather speculative interpretation which employs anthropomorphic expressions apparently without qualification. Cupitt (1980b:216) attacks this in his critical remark that Moltmann 'tells us much of God's emotional life, and of the relations of the persons of the Trinity'. When Moltmann writes about the mystery and immanent life of the Trinity (1981:129-90, esp 161-78. Cf 1979h:92-95) - even at one point referring to his account as 'a description of the primordial relationships in the Trinity' (1981:185) - we find little trace of the sense of inadequacy which theology recognises here. As Peacocke (1981:579) puts it, some of Moltmann's thought 'might seem a little rarified to those who accord less ontological status to the Trinitarian personae and regard Trinitarian statements rather as suitable models in our talk about God'. Indeed, Wiles (1982b:333) even accuses Moltmann of 'uncontrolled speculation, reminiscent of early Gnosticism'. Moltmann does not seem to realise that 'the inadequacy of our formulation of the Trinity of God is an essential element in its truth and precision

. . . [as] not a picturing model with some kind of point to point correspondence between it and God, but a disclosure model (Torrance, 1985:162). These remarks about Moltmann's theology of the cross and of the inner life of the Trinity amount to the criticism that he is naively ambitious in what he tries to say about God because he never conducts a critical discussion of the limits of theological knowledge and language (cf eg Newlands, 1975:148).

Both Mackey and Fiorenza advocate against Moltmann a much more reticent and practice-directed account of the cross. Fiorenza (1974:80) uses Thomas Aquinas' teaching that 'whereas one can explain in what sense a word is denied of God, one cannot explain in what sense a word is affirmed of God' to recommend that speculation upon suffering as an inter-trinitarian event be replaced by attention to the critical and performative function of language about God. Mackey (1983:208, 241) rejects what he calls Moltmann's assumption of 'a kind of pre-existent drama which takes place in God himself' before or during Calvary because the function of doctrine is to point to Jesus and illuminate his significance for Christian faith and practice. 'We may guess at self-differentiation in God, but it is not the business of trinitarian doctrine to describe this'.

It should be pointed out straightaway that Moltmann is sceptical about theologies which are in too much of a hurry to be directly practical. Activism is no substitute for theology but must be seen in a two-way relationship with theology. Moltmann believes that a proper practice of the Christian hope depends upon getting the theology of hope worked out in its true depth so that its Christian character and identity will be apparent. Thus he intends to develop a critical theory of God in the light of the cross which although 'not directly practical . . . changes practice more fundamentally than all the possible alternatives which "the active man" can think out (1974b:25, 291-340; 1979h:81). Insofar as the Christian hope in the face of suffering is sustained by the conviction that God shares our suffering, it is important to try to understand this sharing of our suffering as far as possible, so that our hope might be all the stronger.

Although there is currently a certain popularity around claims that Christian theology should only concern itself with the economic activity of God and not pretend to knowledge of God as he is in himself, this is hardly a satisfactory or even tenable position. If the Christian hope is sustained because God gives himself to us in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, on account of these events we do actually know something about God in himself. It is vital for Christian confidence that

the cross be the truth about God himself, that he be in his innermost being the same as he appears to us in Jesus. The significance of Rahner's maxim that 'the Trinity of the economy of salvation is the immanent Trinity and vice versa' is appropriately summarised by Lash (1986:190) as:

> . . . we have been enabled to trust God's trustworthiness because what God has spoken to us is not some particular message (behind which he might have rather different messages up his sleeve), but is his self-statement in the flesh and texture of our history.

Moltmann's theology represents an understanding that economy and immanence in the doctrine of God must be held together if it is maintained seriously that hope is sustained and grounded by the self-gift of God on the cross. So while there is validity in the criticism of the extent to which Moltmann feels able to 'describe' the inner life of God, the idea that theology cannot or should not ask the truth about God in himself in the light of the cross cannot be entertained seriously. In trying to indicate something of the inner life of the Trinity, Moltmann seeks to ground hope in the very being of God since it is because God is a community of self-differentiation and self-giving that he can give himself to the world. An attempt is being made to locate the ground of hope not simply in the events of cross and resurrection but in the very character and nature of God as he has shown himself to be in cross and resurrection. The general importance of this can hardly be denied (cf Kasper, 1984:197 and Lash, 1986:188-90). It was recognised a long time ago when Mozley (1926:182) asked: 'What is the relationship of the Cross as the historic means of God's redemption of the world to that eternal background of God's love out of which the cross is given?'.

Mackey argues, as we have seen, that trinitarian doctrine at the most should only 'guess at self-differentiation in God'. If Christian hope is sustained by its vision of God as a dynamic self-giving trinitarian unity of love, it will be important for those who seek to live by this hope to explore the cross in these terms. Moltmann's explorations of the trinitarian relationships in highly anthropomorphic terms are probably best understood in the light of his desire to correct what he sees as the modalism of the Western tradition (1981:243) and his desire to speak of Father, Son and Spirit in fully personal terms. The use of models and metaphors has a well-developed history in trinitarian thinking since there is no other way of avoiding complete silence about it. Moltmann's attempt to take this up cannot be faulted in principle. If the execution of this

task is less than convincing it is because he does not follow the tradition closely enough in its reservation of distance between our formulations and the reality of God. Models drawn from human relationships can be used provided it is not forgotten that Father, Son and Spirit are not three persons in the way in which human persons are. Moltmann never discusses this crucial point properly (despite 1981:171-74 and 188-90) and in the next chapter we shall argue that this makes a significant contribution to the theoretical collapse of his doctrine of God which we noted earlier. If Moltmann proceeds rather hastily in telling us something about the triune life of God, nevertheless Mackey underestimates the contribution which this can make to the sustaining of hope and to the provision of a programme for action. Thus Moltmann takes up the social model of the Trinity as a social and political programme for the kind of society Christian hope should work towards (see eg 1981:191-222).

Moltmann does describe what happens between Father and Son on the cross in very anthropomorphic terms without any qualification of this way of speaking. We have already suggested that this enables him to stress the personal and threefold character of the suffering of God in the crucifixion. The anthropomorphic language is obviously in some need of qualification if we are trying to say something about the suffering of God on the basis of Jesus' crucifixion. However, since the human suffering of Jesus is the human embodiment of the suffering of God and our greatest clue to it, there is a prima facie case for speaking of the suffering of God by telling his human story. The central story which any Christian theology of the suffering of God must tell is his story. Faith finds God in 'the man that was called Jesus, and from that ἄνθρωπος no proper theology can ever hope to escape' (McIntyre, 1962:62). Where Moltmann's account is perhaps overly ambitious and not very convincing is in its appearing to treat the Father as if he was another human person in the drama. This happens because he never discusses explicitly the fact that when we speak of the person of Jesus who was crucified and the other 'persons' of Father and Spirit, the term 'person' undergoes a significant shift of meaning. Therefore, ironically, although Moltmann intends to speak of the cross as an inner-trinitarian event between three divine persons, it often sounds like an occurrence between three human personae. If Moltmann acknowledged this shift of meaning explicitly it would lead to the important qualification that, while the best possibility of trying to be true to the love of God may be to describe the experience of the Father in terms of human emotion such as 'grief', nevertheless the experience of the Father is not the same as human grief since he is not a human person. The language of

'grief' may be the best vehicle for expressing the costliness of the self-giving of the cross upon which Jesus truly dies, but in order to preserve the fact that we are speaking of what happens between Jesus and God some indication of the metaphorical nature of this way of speaking should be given. This in itself would be a significant negative qualification, and by reminding us that we are not dealing with a threefold human drama, it would prevent us from investing too much in the metaphors which we draw from human loss in order to illumine the significance of the death of Jesus for God.

It is an interesting question just how much a Christian theology needs to say about the suffering of God in order to sustain hope. Three points seem necessary here: 1. to indicate the cross and resurrection as the historical basis for believing that God suffers with us and triumphs over suffering. 2. to explore the vision of God to which Jesus' death and resurrection give rise. 3. to outline some of the practical implications which follow from this vision of God for how we are to live with suffering. All theologies of suffering will address themselves to these issues although with a considerable variety of approaches and results. Moltmann concentrates his efforts upon number 2. Although he has developed the practical significance of the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of the required direction of socio-political change, he has yet to say much about the implications for the bearing of personal suffering. Number 2 is very important because it allows us to indicate the ultimate metaphysical ground of Christian hope. While the needs of sufferers can be met in terms of numbers 1 and 3 for the most part, theology as such must seek to understand the business of number 2 as thoroughly as possible. This is something of an over-simplification because the reassurance of hope is that God suffers with us, loves us, triumphs over our suffering in the long run, and enables us to live with dignity and purpose in the short run. Therefore, pastoral support will require us to speak of God in a way which draws upon number 2.

To say something about God is essential to the hope which faith brings to suffering. Moltmann is an interesting example because he recognises the importance of this. There are difficulties with some aspects of his work but the attempt to see God in personal and relational terms is fundamentally what is required to bring the God of Christian experience to the forefront of the discussion of suffering. Probably both faith and theology would profit from a rather more reserved description of the suffering of God. The suffering of God is a mystery and just exactly what happened between Jesus and God on the cross is not open to our inspection. Our attempts to grasp it must be used as aids to enter more deeply into fellow-

ship with the threefold mystery of love which is found there. It is possible to say too much about the suffering of God and Moltmann exemplifies this in places. But he also exemplifies the way in which the conviction that the mystery of God's love expressed in the cross is the strength in which our suffering is upheld, requires from us the most strenuous efforts to understand it for what it is. If it is possible to say too much about the suffering of God, the greater danger, quite possibly, is that we shall be too cautious and fail to say enough.

(e) Suffering is not only a problem for human beings

One final critical point which we wish to raise about Moltmann's theology of suffering is that it is surprisingly anthropocentric. This is surprising because of Moltmann's well-known ecological concerns (1985) and his concern that all suffering should be taken up into the trinitarian history of God. Indeed, his theology looks forward to all creation sharing in the 'inner-trinitarian life' of God in 'the eternal feast of heaven and earth' (1981:127, 128). Difficult a thought as it is, the Christian hope does embrace the whole 'creation which has been groaning in travail together until now' (Romans 8.22). This means that although the Christian hope for suffering is focussed on human suffering, it is not limited to human suffering. So far the theology of hope has not really taken this seriously (see Ford's complaint in his response to Cousins, 1972). It is important that Christian theology reflects upon this not least because of the problem of how we treat the other animals with whom we share our planet. There are complicated and very serious moral questions here. Christian theology has a special responsibility because of its recognition of God's love for all his creation, and because it is increasingly recognised that some interpretations of the creation story have led to an instrumental and very damaging way of relating to the rest of creation. Whatever we decide about these questions, on the double ground of both the doctrine of creation and the theory of evolution, it is hard to deny our essential solidarity with the rest of creation, and yet we have still to organise our life in such a way that we respect this (see Midgley, 1983; Frey, 1983 and Singer, 1985). The suffering of the higher animals should concern us in particular. Ward (1982b:202) takes this seriously enough to suggest that '(i)mmorality, for animals as well as humans, is a necessary condition of any acceptable theodicy'. For the moment, however, we are concerned with the current suffering of animals. If God is love, we must affirm his identification with and sharing in animal suffering. Even if we

can only affirm this divine identification with animal suffering, without it being visible in the same way as his sharing in human suffering is, this should at least prompt us to take the suffering of animals, which is open to our investigation and alteration, more seriously. In this sense Moltmann is quite correct that the theology of God's suffering is an exercise in critical theory which leads to more humane practice.

vi The redemption of suffering

On the basis of Christ's death and resurrection Christians hope for the redemption of suffering. This hope is justified because God shares our suffering and is not overcome by it. God's victory over suffering was the central intention of the classic insistence upon the impassibility of God. Therefore, although the axiom is much out of favour, it is important to re-visit it to see if it can be stated more satisfactorily in the light of its intention and contemporary concerns.

(a) Divine impassibility reconsidered

Ever since Mozley charted the history of the axiom of the impassibility of God in Christian theology and posed some particularly penetrating questions (see especially 1926:177-83), the patristic teaching has been viewed increasingly as an inadequate expression of the gospel. Given the fact that the story which faith tells about God is the story of Jesus' passion, there was always a difficulty about asserting that God could not suffer. The early Fathers were aware of this. Our contemporary awareness of the problem of suffering has forced Christian theologians to re-examine the patristic teaching, and there is something like a consensus that it is only possible to believe in God if he does share our suffering and that this is precisely what Jesus' crucifixion shows us. Ward (1982b:198) expresses the view of many when he says that 'a perfect creator must be conceived as himself sharing in the pain and suffering of the universe'. Young (1977:34) puts the matter more starkly:

> Salvation and atonement are the core of the Christian message. For me, experience of suffering, sin, decay and 'abnormality' as a constituent part of the world, would make belief in God impossible without a Calvary-centred religious myth. It is only because I can see God entering the darkness

> of human suffering and evil in his creation, recognizing it for what it really is, meeting it and conquering it, that I can accept a religious view of the world.

This has become so important for contemporary Christian theology that '(i)f a concept of God is not capable of expressing this constitutive compassion of God, it is disqualified as a Christian concept of God' (Lochman, 1975: 181).

The contemporary rejection of God's apatheia must be treated carefully if we are to avoid a crude misrepresentation of the patristic teaching and learn from it. Despite its difficulties, it preserves some essential teaching about the suffering of God which any adequate Christian theology of God's suffering must take up. Thus Louth (1979:392) expresses his doubts over the correctness of Juengel's comment that the 'distinction between God and God based on the cross of Jesus Christ has destroyed the axiom of absoluteness, the axiom of apathy, the axiom of immutability, all of which are unsuitable axioms for the Christian concept of God' (1983:373). Although he wishes to overcome the barrier which the axiom sets to thinking of 'the crucified God', Moltmann's reception of it is much more sympathetic than Juengel's. The patristic axiom is not really an axiom at all but a statement of comparison in which it is made clear that, unlike the suffering of creatures, God is not made to suffer unwillingly through a deficiency of his being. 'The justifiable denial that God is capable of suffering because of a deficiency in his being may not lead to a denial that he is incapable of suffering out of the fullness of his being, ie his love' (1981:223; 1974b:229, 230). The early Fathers could not really free themselves from the thought that suffering must imply a deficiency of being because they thought of it in predominantly passive terms, and so they struggled to relate the suffering of the cross to God properly. In the very different contemporary philosophical climate, impassibility can no longer serve to protect the perfection of the God who is love; quite the opposite, the perfection of love must mean that God suffers with us (Ward, 1982:199).

Although the Fathers could not understand the suffering of the cross with the theological realism of contemporary theology, it is a common mistake to think that they 'simply took over the apathia-axiom and thus abridged the Bible's testimony'. In fact, patristic theology often simply reflected the paradox that God suffered impassibly in the flesh. Taking some hints from Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and Origen, Kasper understands

the suffering of God as the power of his love, the divine kenosis as the other side of the divine plerosis:

> To predicate becoming, suffering and movement of God is to understand God as the fullness of being, as pure actuality, as overflow of life and love. Because God is the omnipotence of love, he can as it were indulge in the weakness of love; he can enter into suffering and death without perishing therein. Only thus can he redeem our death through his own death (1984:190, 191, 195).

Although the axiom of impassibility does stand in the way of a fully developed theology of the suffering of God, the positive intention in it provides us with three vital concerns. First, the suffering of God is not passive but active. Given that this is the essential thrust of the patristic position, it is surprising that Juengel is quite so unsympathetic to it, especially when we consider his following of Barth's account of 'God's being-in-the-act-of-suffering', in which the affirmed passivity of the Son's passion is also the highest activity of obedience within the life of God (see 1976b:83-87). The fact that God's suffering is active and not imposed upon him means that he suffers freely. If God does suffer it must be because he wants to share in our suffering. He does this because he loves the world. Therefore, the second point to note about the patristic teaching is that it preserves the conviction that the ultimate mystery of God's suffering with us, above all on the cross, is the mystery of God's love for the world. Third, because God acts upon suffering and does not suffer merely passively, his suffering is creative and transforming. Here we should recall our remarks in the context of atonement that to see the cross merely in terms of God's identification with us is a quite inadequate basis for a soteriology. Macquarrie (1984:180-81. Cf 41 and 1978c:69) makes the useful suggestion that God unites both passibility and impassibility within himself since cross and resurrection show that while God does suffer 'he is never overwhelmed by it'. This is much better than the apparently self-defeating argument of Spufford (1985:445) that 'because the creator loved his creation enough to become helpless with it and suffer in it, totally overwhelmed by the pain of it, I found there was still hope'. We need to be reminded that '(b)y itself, assertions, however moving, that God too suffers do not constitute atonement but could only be a confirmation of despair' (Tinsley, 1982:103. Cf Surin, 1982b:115 for criticisms of the Moltmann-Soelle strategy for solving theodicy). While contemporary

theology has acted upon the maxim tht 'only the suffering God can help' (Bonhoeffer, 1971:361), it is equally important to insist that a God who only suffers is of no help at all, or at best only of the very limited help of someone who is as much afflicted as we are, who may empathise with us but without the ability to redeem our suffering. '"Vulnerability" by itself is simply not sufficient to provide a firm basis for Christian ministry' (Walker, 1985:40). Because the suffering of God is creative and transformative, our suffering is not without hope.

(b) Suffering and hope

For Christian faith, it is possible to hope even in the midst of suffering and death because through Jesus' suffering and death God's kingdom came into the world. Therefore, suffering, death and hope can belong together despite the fact that contemporary culture often sees them as mutually exclusive. Indeed, Jesus' suffering and death is the sign of God's love for the world. Faith is well aware of the harsh reality of suffering and yet it must view it in the fundamentally hopeful light of Christ's victory over suffering, sin and death. Suffering is not all of a piece and the suffering of Jesus is only one form and instance of the variety of suffering that is experienced in the world. Nevertheless, the suffering of Jesus may be seen as a sacramental representation of God's sharing in all suffering wherever and whenever and however it takes place. The fact that suffering is not a single identifiable experience means that the hopefulness of Christian faith must be conveyed in a number of responses in the light of the cross.

Perhaps the first response which we can make when we reflect upon Jesus' crucifixion is that some suffering is inflicted upon its victims by other human beings. Moltmann (1981:51) writes that 'the experience of suffering goes far beyond the question of guilt and innocence, leaving it behind as totally superficial'. While this is undoubtedly true of some types of suffering, the story of Jesus' crucifixion shows that it is simply untrue that wherever there is suffering the question of responsibility and guilt is superficial. It is dangerous to overlook the fact that much suffering is avoidable and is traceable to human causes. No one can seriously think otherwise in the light of the many deliberately perpetrated atrocities of this century. We must not 'ignore the distinction between suffering that we can and cannot end' (Soelle, 1975:19). In order to bring hope to suffering, it is necessary to ask what are the causes of this suffering and whether these causes are subject to our intervention. A

great deal of the suffering of the world could be removed if we would engage this question seriously. The entire Third World (but also many features of the way we organise our life in advanced societies) is testimony to the power for good of this question. Jesus' crucifixion shows us that we must always be alert to the callous and cynically inhumane use of power. In his name, Christian faith must confront this and seek to put to an end the wholly avoidable suffering which it causes those who are not able to defend themselves against it. Jesus' case should give Christianity a particularly strong sense of responsibility for the victims of political repression. Remembering that Jesus himself died in this way should be enough to warn Christianity of the dangers of keeping out of politics.

In his preparedness for the cross, Jesus shows that suffering and even death are not to be avoided at all costs. Hope can be found in suffering if it can be accepted as the cost of faithfulness to a cause. In such cases, even though the cost may be total, the sufferer transcends the suffering and him- or herself because something is considered more important than the suffering itself and the preservation of one's own life. Insofar as the suffering becomes the vehicle for something greater, perhaps even an expression of an unconditional fidelity to others, we may even speak of suffering being transformed. Jesus' sacrificial suffering for the sake of God's kingdom does not suggest that all sacrificial suffering can bring hope to the world in this way. It is vitally important to consider to what end the preparedness for suffering is directed. The terrorist is prepared for suffering and death, but here the capacity for self-transcendence has been horribly corrupted by being harnessed to a fundamentally destructive attitude to human life. The mere fact that someone suffers for a cause does not show their cause to be just. Otherwise, suffering may easily become 'an immensely desirable, invincible weapon' and the cross is abused ideologically as 'a defence of my position, a legitimation' (Williams, 1982:78 contra Soelle, 1975:130-131). Jesus' suffering was directed towards the gift of God's kingdom to men and women. As such, it shows both that suffering is not an ideal in itself (which would be a dehumanising masochism) and that the value in suffering (especially, but not exclusively, self-sacrificial suffering for others) depends on whether it is used for positive human advancement or not. But Jesus does show that sometimes suffering is the vehicle and expression of hope.

The fact that there is one kind of suffering in the story of Jesus helps us to be aware that human life and suffering are inextricably connected in one way or another. The desire for a life free from all

suffering is an impossible evasion of the facts of life; to show this in one simple way we need do no more than think of the fact that we shall all die, and most of us will grow old first, and for most of us this will require the bearing of some suffering. To be encouraged to think about the inevitability of suffering in our lives and how, if possible, to use it, is very important for a society where 'the popular philosophy of life is an unashamed hedonism. Suffering is regarded as an unqualified evil, and every effort is made to eliminate it' (Macquarrie, 1982:229). The desire to be free from suffering as far as possible is a proper one, but it may also be the reflection of a narcissistic culture. Soelle believes that Christianity itself has become deeply compromised by this since '(f)ar and wide, contemporary Christianity is the suffering-free religion for a world perceived as without suffering'. Such an attitude runs away from reality, and the worst thing about this is that it leaves others to suffer alone. Even the seemingly insurmountable barriers of the legacies of brutalisation, insensibility, mutilation and injury 'can be crossed . . . by sharing the pain of the sufferers with them, not leaving them alone and making their cry louder'. Soelle issues a timely warning that '(t)he ideal of a life free from suffering, the illusion of painlessness, destroys people's ability to feel anything', and adds the interesting comment that:

> The question addressed to suffering cannot be addressed only from the modern perspective that asks about its causes and their abolition. Rather it must be approached as well through the traditional question about its meaning and function (1975:128, 178, 4).

We must not seek a life free from suffering if this means withdrawing from the suffering of others instead of relieving it and making it more bearable. Also, for our own sake, for coming to terms with what it means to be human in all its finitude, we must reckon with the inevitable fact that we shall all suffer in one way or another. Both of these points, if reflected upon in a constructive fashion, can lead to very positive changes in our attitude to suffering. This positive change is part of the work of hope which Jesus' suffering continues to accomplish.

As the sacramental sign of God's sharing in all suffering, the cross offers hope in all suffering. Soelle argues that we can no longer think about the cross in this way. The consolation of the passion is to be found in the fact that 'how the man Jesus suffered means a strengthening, a presentation of human possibilities, a hope of humanizing even our

suffering'. While we would not wish to deny the importance of this, it cannot be a Christian statement of the matter if this strengthening is not perceived in its theological depth, as being sustained by the Father into whose hands Jesus committed himself. Moreover, Soelle's position which restricts itself to purely human possibilities, can offer little hope or consolation in those situations where human possibilities are extremely curtailed, running out fast, or perhaps even already extinguished. Yet suffering often has this effect. The hope which Soelle can hold out to the suffering of the world is notably limited when she thinks of incidents which lead to death because, of course, death is the exhaustion of human possibilities. For example, when discussing the death of a fourteen year old Jewish boy, she tells us that although '(i)n mythological language it was possible to say that God will wipe away all tears', this language 'means nothing any longer and . . . can console no one any longer'. What we can do is 'live in such a way that our life portrays a hope that other children will suffer no longer'. We do not wish to underestimate the grave difficulties in thinking that some larger context can redeem even the worst inhumanities which people suffer. Yet the Christian hope is that 'all shall be well', and a theology which has no place for resurrection cannot be a Christian theology. It is significant that Soelle's denial that there are possibilities beyond those which are in human hands should be found together with her description of 'the mythical story of the death and resurrection of Christ' (1975:139, 173, 147).

We are tempted to think that Soelle's theology involves a systematic rejection of God (here we should recall her reply to Moltmann that 'Christ died not in God, but he dies - today - in us') in any properly transcendent sense. It is as if 'God' functions as a code for human possibilities which can be realised in the context of the Christian story of Jesus, but does not indicate any genuinely transcendent ground of such. In the context of asking about hope in the face of suffering which brings about (especially untimely and ghastly) death, it is a matter of no small note that the test of Christian belief in God is whether one believes in resurrection. This is a particularly acute test of belief in God because we are being asked whether we believe that there are further possibilities for human life when all its own possibilities have been exhausted, and which therefore must rest with God. On the ground of Christ's resurrection, Christians are convinced in hope that there are possibilities of God's love which go beyond all human imagining and which must be left in God's hands. In his death and resurrection, Christ shows us that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8.38-39). This is why even the worst suffering,

which leaves us with a feeling of impotence and defeat, cannot eliminate hope for its victims. No matter what we do to each other, or the ravages of illness and misfortune, this cannot be the final truth which rather lies in the victory of God's love. This anticipates some of the discussion of the next chapter about death and resurrection, and of chapter three on the subject of the universal reach of Christian hope.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have argued that Christian hope is grounded in history, specifically the historical accomplishment of Jesus focussed in his death and resurrection. The resurrection shows that the life and death of Jesus is the personal presence and self-giving of God, and that this loving self-giving of God is not overcome by evil, suffering, sin and death. It is of the greatest importance that Christian hope springs from such an unpromising event as the crucifixion of Jesus. If this is remembered, Christian faith will be saved from any facile optimism which has not reckoned with the depth of the challenge to hope posed by evil, suffering, sin and death. Although realistic about the negative features of the world, Christian hope sees more possibilities in the human situation than other forms of hope because it is convinced that God is with us. Because God is with us and will not abandon us, Christian hope refuses to surrender any situation to final despair. It believes in the final triumph of God's love, even though it must admit in some situations that in the final analysis the manner of the accomplishment of God's purposes remains known only to him.

Atonement is the basis of hope since genuine hope can only be possible if sin and evil can be overcome. Christian faith looks back to Jesus' death and resurrection in the conviction that he was not overcome but rather overcame the sin and evil which led to his death. In this way God gave himself to us and transformed our situation by making it possible for us to be truly human. It is in fellowship with Jesus and with each other that we can explore what this might mean. God's saving of the world is a continual process taking place throughout our lives and necessary for each generation. The resurrection is not the end of God's saving work but rather the beginning of his making effective throughout the world the new possibilities of human existence which Jesus introduced. Indeed, the resurrection confirms that the way in which the world is to be made whole is through the kind of loving self-giving, the transformation through

identification, which we see in Jesus' life and death. Therefore, explorations in the theology of atonement are not simply attempts to understand what happened 2000 years ago; they are also attempts to discern the kind of commitment which is required of Christians and the churches if the world is to be moved in the direction of God's saving will. The saving of the world is an ongoing task in which the church is given to share, and for which she gains strength in her ongoing experience of the way in which Christ is still with us, giving himself to us and making community possible. This shows the importance of the Spirit and the sacraments for the practice of Christian hope. Moving the world in the direction which faith believes Jesus makes possible is a difficult and complex matter. Just because it is possible to go in this direction does not mean that there is any easy or obvious way to proceed. The conviction that it is possible is, however, very important if we are to keep on searching for better ways of organising our life together so that all the good things of the human potential may flourish. These remarks show that the practice of politics is very central to the gospel and not at all peripheral as is often naively suggested. In our final chapter we shall see that the saving of the world requires a preparedness for politics and that politics requires to be saved by the transformation of its practice so that it embodies some crucial insights of the gospel concerning human relationships. Thus the Christian hope for salvation must take in a wide sweep. Ultimately, it is not possible to make sense of the Christian hope for salvation unless it includes its ground in the past, its practice in the present, and its fulfilment beyond death.

It is not just sin and evil which threaten to overwhelm hope but also suffering and death. Jesus' death and resurrection overcome both and allow us to hope despite the harsh presence of these realities for all of us. In this present chapter we have concentrated on suffering, which must also be seen as part of Christ's work. Since the suffering of God has become an increasingly important theme in contemporary theology, we have made a study of perhaps the most important attempt to think out a theology of the suffering God. While acknowledging our indebtedness to Moltmann's thesis of 'the crucified God', we have been critical of certain features of his account and have tried to indicate ways in which it could be reconstructed more adequately. In particular, his concern for a theology of the suffering God which could speak to us is frustrated by his tendency to retreat from the history in which men and women suffer into the life of God in an idealist fashion so that the particular, concrete human suffering of Jesus disappears from view. The basis of hope in the triumphant love of

God is obscured by his use of the notion of contradiction as a central interpretative category for what happens between Father and Son in the crucifixion. It may even be argued that Moltmann's own language shows that at times his theology collapses under the pressure of this theme. His discussion of suffering does not pay enough attention to the fact that although the term 'suffering' is generic, there is no single identifiable experience of suffering. In this way, an opportunity to relate more specifically and more powerfully to people in their suffering is missed.

There is hope for our suffering because God shares in this in such a way that our suffering is transformed. Once again, this point emphasises that the theme of identification, so important in contemporary theology, by itself is not an adequate basis for a Christian soteriology. The classic axiom of the impassibility of God is interesting in this respect because while it obscured the full sharing of God in our suffering, it did preserve the vital insight for Christian hope that God is not overcome by suffering but rather overcomes it. If we are to avoid idealising history and flattening-out the differences within suffering, as happens when there is talk of 'all suffering' being present on the cross, we must look upon the cross as the sacramental representation of God's identification with and transformation of every instance of suffering over time and place. The transformation of suffering cannot be achieved in an instant and may sometimes only be fulfilled in the eschaton. Once again, therefore, soteriology must not be reduced to staurology but requires us to think of the wholeness of the vision which Christian hope holds to.

Because suffering is not a generic experience, Christian hope must make a number of responses to suffering which will recognise this fact explicitly. In the light of the victory of God's love in the resurrection of Jesus, no suffering can be abandoned without hope. Even where all human possibilities have been exhausted, and indeed especially here, Christian hope affirms this because it is hope in God who raised Jesus from the dead when all his human possibilities had been exhausted.

It is now time to examine further the grounding and logic of Christian hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO

Death and Resurrection in the Perspective of Jesus' Resurrection

Introduction

Cross and resurrection together form the ground of Christan hope. In the first chapter we thought about the hope which Jesus brings to the experience of sin, evil and suffering. Now we consider the hope which Jesus' death and resurrection bring to the fact that we shall all die. We have stressed that Christian hope is grounded in the history of Jesus Christ, and early in this chapter we shall argue that the resurrection of Jesus is to be considered part of the historical ground of faith.

Since Christian faith is Easter faith, it presupposes a necessarily specific attitude towards death, namely, that Jesus has overcome it. Therefore, death cannot be the controlling thought of a Christian theology, as it often is in philosophy. 'A theology of death can be no more than a chapter of theology, albeit an important and decisive one' (Juengel, 1975:61. Cf 60, 28). Yet that death is spoken of in the context of Christ's victory does not detract from the fact that death is a proper subject in itself for Christian theology and hope. Although it would be false to faith's own foundations if we were to talk about death as if Christ's resurrection had not happened, nevertheless we must not hurry past death as if Christian hope was simply concerned with the conquest or overcoming of death and not also with the significance of death itself. There is no resurrection without death first, and Christian hope will do us a disservice if it only adds to the contemporary avoidance of death. Christian hope should help people to face death and not simply to look beyond it. It can help us to find positive significance in our mortality and to find hope both in the approach to death and in what we may trust in for ourselves after death.

The theology of death and resurrection likewise must not proceed too quickly or easily by Christ's death. It is set the difficult task of preserving the full seriousness of his death for the very life of God without expressing this in such a way that resurrection becomes theoretically impossible because the account given involves a breakdown of the life of God (as Moltmann's account does). We shall suggest that the theology of creation and the theology of resurrection need to be brought together, and that metaphors of passivity or interruption must be sought as an attempt to

engage the problem of Christ's death through the theology of Holy Saturday.

Resurrection is not simply a statement about Jesus being alive again or about our future destinies beyond death; for this is to trivialise the theological meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection. By contrast resurrection is a christological statement about God's ways in the world. As such it pervades our understanding of the entirety of the practice of faith and requires a social, even political, interpretation.

Although a useful corrective to the narrow and reductionist interpretation of Jesus' resurrection in terms of individual or social life after death, the theological approach above must not be taken as a replacement for traditional eschatology. The final eschatological dimension of Christian hope which looks forward to the consummation of personal life in the context of a new creation is indispensable for Christian faith. The overall shape and direction of this consummation can be indicated by way of projection from what we believe to be true about our present experience of God, the world and others. In this way the final hope can be shown to be consistent with an overall vision of the Christian faith.

1 Jesus' resurrection as the ground of Christian hope

The ground of Christian faith and hope is not simply in Jesus' life and death but rather in his life, death and resurrection. It is because Christian faith hopes in God who has power even to give life to the dead that it is a total hope which can hope for all things in spite of all things. To say that hope is grounded in Jesus' death and resurrection is less than clear since 'resurrection' can take on a confusing variety of meanings in the work of different theologians. Our claim that faith and hope are grounded historically in Jesus' death and resurrection must therefore be explained clearly.

(a) Resurrection as the mysterious initiative of God

Our opening chapter showed how Christian hope is constituted by the historical achievement of Jesus' death and his ongoing achievement. However, if we examine the early Easter traditions we find that the first believers were able to find hope in Jesus' death only after subsequent experiences of the risen Jesus. The belief that Jesus was risen was connected inextricably with the very early tradition of Christ's appear-

ances, an ancient formulaic statement of which is found in 1 Corinthians 15.3b-5. Goppelt (1981:235) points out that the passive verb ōphthē ('he was seen'), which designates the appearances, was probably used by the primitive kerygma and by Paul in the technical sense, which it possessed in the Septuagint by this time, of God coming forth out of hiddenness and addressing people to establish a bond with them. The verb is better translated as 'he appeared' and expresses something of a divine initiative in the rise of the Easter faith. The strong emphasis on the appearances in the New Testament confirms the fact that faith is aroused, rekindled by Jesus making himself present to the disciples.

Some interpretations prefer to think in the opposite direction and view the appearance stories as the creation of a self-generated faith. It is certainly true that the entire literature of Easter is the product of believing communities; the tradition was formed and preserved in order to pass on the Easter faith. The crucial question is not so much whether the stories as we now have them were shaped by the Easter faith (there seems little doubt that the answer to this is positive) but rather whether appearances of the risen Jesus were the original stimulus to faith and tradition, and not simply its expression. Lindars ascribes to Peter 'a cardinal position in the formation of the church after the devastating tragedy of Jesus' death'. Although Peter denied Jesus, later on he 'realized that it was impossible to deny that God had been active in Jesus', and now believing in his messiahship and Lordship, he expressed this in terms of resurrection 'whether there was an event which can be described as rising from the tomb or not' (1981:494, 495, 499). This develops the approach of an earlier article in which he wrote that '(t)he real grounds for the disciples' conviction are to be found in the profound impact of the personality and teaching of Jesus himself, which are such as to make the application of the apocalyptic myth to him not only plausible but almost inevitable' (1974:381). If we were to accept Lindars' reconstruction it would not count against the facticity of Jesus' resurrection from the grave (he does not intend to pronounce any judgement upon this), although this is certainly not essential for his view of the Easter faith. The possibilities here are complex since theoretically we could imagine the sort of psychological recovery which he envisages together with subsequent appearances and meetings with the risen Jesus ('It is quite possible that the dawning resurrection-faith gave rise to remarkable resurrection-experiences' [Cupitt, 1985:167]), and, as we shall see later, it would be possible to claim that Jesus was risen and alive even if his corpse still lay in the tomb.

As an account of what happened, Lindars' interpretation is deficient because it conveys nothing of the sense of encounter and renewed fellowship which is so characteristic of the appearance stories. It is a possible reconstruction but there are strong reasons to prefer the view that the Easter faith arose as a consequence of an initiative from the side of God and not as a product of reflection upon Jesus' life, and that this is what the appearance stories indicate. Lindars himself admits that the crucifixion must have devastated the disciples initially and that the re-birth of faith must have been extremely difficult. His view correctly realises that faith in the resurrection must have made use of religious ideas available at the time and integrated this new trust with what was remembered of Jesus before his death. It is an important reminder that the Easter faith could not have arisen in an interpretive vacuum. However, the fundamental objection to his reconstruction had been made already by Fuller (1972:169) who stressed the vital importance of revelatory encounters with the risen Christ for the rise of the Easter faith:

> This proclamation, however, could not have been self-generated, nor could it have arisen directly from Jesus' proclamation of the advent of the kingdom. If the only sequel to that proclamation was the crucifixion, then that proclamation would have been demonstrably false. Jesus had proclaimed the coming of the kingdom and it had not come. Instead, his message had ostensibly been utterly discredited by the crucifixion. The very fact of the church's kerygma therefore requires that the historian postulate some other event over and above Good Friday, an event which is not itself the 'rise of the Easter faith', but the cause of the Easter faith.

Approaches which see the rise of the Easter faith as having been self-generated fail to take the devastation of the crucifixion with sufficient seriousness. In this way the depth of Christian hope and its resourcefulness, which is <u>not</u> simply a human resourcefulness, does not emerge. As Lindars' account is improbable on historical grounds so it is a serious undercutting of Christian hope theologically. If the resurrection appearances are seen as a divine initiative which brings faith to life out of the depths of despair, it will be possible to accept much more radically than Lindars does just how totally some events can crush human hopes. The Easter gospel is so full of hope because it has been through the valley of

the shadow of death. When all hope has gone and when all the human possibilities are extinguished, God brings life out of death by raising Jesus and sending him back to the disciples. The appearance stories, when they are read this way, preserve the depth and resourcefulness of the Christian hope precisely because it is hope in the saving action of God. Lindars quite fails to make clear this thoroughly theological character of the Easter faith.

Beyond indicating the presence of a divine initiative, it is very difficult to know what sort of event(s) the appearance stories represent (cf Evans, 1970:130 and Dunn, 1975:114-34). There is a mystery surrounding the appearances but this is exceeded by a far greater mystery surrounding the resurrection itself. The absence of any attempt in the New Testament to describe the resurrection itself is appropriate since it was not witnessed by anyone (a relatively trivial point) and, much more significant theologically, it belongs to the transcendence of God (cf the language of being raised to the right hand of the Father, and the conjunction of resurrection, exaltation and Lordship) since Christ was raised from death into the glory of God beyond the limitations of our space and time, experience and categories. St Ignatius of Antioch's remark that 'Christ rose in the silence of God' (see O'Collins, 1978:79) means that the demand, when it is made, to say exactly what happened in the resurrection is both unrealisable and inappropriate. By the very nature of that which it must reflect upon, all Easter theology is inadequate and fails to speak properly about its content. Indeed, it will be true to its subject matter only if it preserves a keen awareness of 'the unfathomable strangeness of Easter - where human perception touches the very frontiers of the eternal' (MacKinnon, 1979b:69). Christian theology recognises here, as so often, that 'what needs to be said cannot be said' (Lash, 1982b:77).

The truth of the resurrection is not measured by our ability to describe what happened. In fact a concentration upon the question of what happened, either in abstraction from the practice of faith or when this is taken as being the focus of our concern, is basically an irreligious approach far removed from the New Testament. As Wilckens (1977:121) tells us:

> The whole point of what the early tradition was getting at, when it asserted its occurrence, can only be estimated if one concentrates on understanding the movement into which the experience of the occurrence of Jesus' resurrection pushed the Church in primitive Christianity.

The meaning, significance and truth of resurrection extend far beyond the narrow viewpoint of what happened to Jesus on Easter Sunday (although without this nothing at all would have happened). The question of what happened and its importance can be approached only through what happened in the practice of the early Christian communities. If we cannot say what happened in resurrection, nevertheless the truth and significance of Jesus' resurrection can be done and shown in practice. This is what the appearances of the risen Jesus effect - faith, hope, forgiveness, love, mission. It is because a proper Christian concern with resurrection has much more to do with the possibilities given to the world by the raising of Jesus than with the extent of our ability to understand the raising itself that Christian entry into the mystery of Christ's resurrection is so activist and even political.

It is now clear why the use of metaphor is essential to the conveying of faith in Jesus' resurrection. The basic metaphors used are 'resurrection' itself and being raised to the 'right hand' of the Father. The metaphor of resurrection attempts to speak of 'another event that eludes everyday experience and can therefore only be expressed indirectly . . . through the image of waking from sleep which is taken from ordinary experience' (Pannenberg, 1968a:74). Its use indicates that '(a) theology of the risen Jesus will always be, to a greater or lesser degree, a negative theology, obliged to confess its conceptual and imaginative poverty' (Williams, 1982:91). This is because metaphor includes 'a silent but present negative' which denies the literal truth of the words used (McFague, 1983:13; Lash, 1982b:82). Metaphor is a warning not to be unwisely knowledgeable about what is intrinsically an impenetrable mystery. But metaphor does also afford some entry into the mystery by creating new meanings and possibilities for human imagination and action. We saw that the metaphorical character of Christ's atonement, and of our attempts to appropriate it, is very important for the ongoing task of saving the world. Metaphor has an active character. It has the potential to indicate both the mystery of the resurrection and the importance of entering into it and witnessing to its truth through the practice of Christian faith, hope and love.

(b) Resurrection as an historical event

Although it is very common for theologians to deny that Jesus' resurrection is an historical event, arguably it is very important to affirm its nature as an historical event. The denial can spring from some

important concerns and is not necessarily, or perhaps even usually, a denial that something really happened to Jesus which is best indicated, even if very imperfectly, by saying that God raised him from the dead.

Perhaps the most important reason for denying that Jesus' resurrection was an historical event is the recognition that the act of raising a man from the dead must be of a very different order from the spatio-temporal events to which we are accustomed. Thus Wiles (1982a:59, 72) points out that the resurrection is an event of a very different kind from Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus' death conforms to our experience of reality but his resurrection is a unique occurrence in our world which breaks through the spatio-temporal limitations of human existence. Therefore the categories of 'the real' and 'reality' when 'applied to this event which transcends all other events . . . can be used only in inverted commas. Genuine faith has always admitted that all talk of the resurrection runs into logical difficulties' (Juengel, 1975:81). The denial of Jesus' resurrection as an historical event seeks to recognise the uniqueness and the victory of his having been raised from the dead. It is not an historical event because it contains so much more than all the other events of history.

A second important reason why it is often denied that Jesus' resurrection was an historical event is a concern to protect faith from the vicissitudes of historical research. Such research can only provide us with judgements of probability and it may well be felt that probability is an inadequate basis for an absolute commitment. We may make several comments about this. First, Christian faith is misunderstood if it is thought possible to disentangle it from what actually happened to Jesus after his death. This still leaves open the question of whether 'what actually happened' is best characterised as an historical event. Second, the basis of faith is located not simply in terms of what happened two thousand years ago, crucial as this is. Faith is also sustained by the ongoing experience of the church. Where the truth of Jesus' resurrection is experienced in the life of the church now Christians will have good reason for believing that their claims about what happened shortly after Jesus' death are true.

Third, just as faith has always counted historical evidence as important support for its claims (see eg 1 Corinthians 15.3-8), such that it can claim a rational foundation, it is still a matter of trust because the historical evidence which is available can be interpreted in other ways. Historical research cannot prove or verify Christian faith since 'there is a logical gap between historical scholarship and faith' (Sutherland, 1984:136, cf 133; Pailin, 1975:102; Wiles, 1974:49). This

makes Christian faith precarious if we hold that it is grounded in history since both the evidence and its interpretation are disputable. Nevertheless, we should be wary of attempts to make faith certain. The search for certainty in an uncertain world is understandable but Christian faith is more honest about the world when it insists that life must be lived without the comfort of invulnerability and maintains this attitude towards even its own foundations both in the past and in contemporary experience. We must entrust ourselves to the mystery of God, even though there is enough evidence to make such trust quite different from mere foolishness. The example of Jesus' death should remind faith that trust is necessary and may be put to the test severely. The fact is that we can live our lives on the basis of something for which there are no irrefutable or invulnerable grounds - marriage and faith show that this can be a rational and rewarding adventure. In both cases confidence is an adequate, indeed more realistic, replacement for certainty, and confidence can grow over time such that it can withstand even the most searching challenges. Bultmann (1952:322-23) pointed out that since 'faith is "hope" which has its foundations in "grace" and hence "does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5), faith is naturally also confidence' (cf 2 Corinthians 3.4).

Fourth, if the invulnerability of faith is supposedly located in our decision or experience, this is hardly any less open to criticism - especially if it cannot appeal to evidence outside of itself - and it can scarcely hope to convince others who will seek more publicly available attestation of its veracity. Such attestation must be sought at least in part from an examination of the historical events surrounding the rise of the Easter faith. The case for understanding Jesus' resurrection as an historical event is largely a matter of maintaining the necessary connections between resurrection and his death which came before it, and these events which came after it.

Even if the resurrection of Jesus is not a straightforward historical event, it may in fact be more misleading to deny that the resurrection is an historical event than it is to affirm its historical character. Indeed, it may even be vital for Christian faith and hope that the historical event character of Jesus' resurrection be affirmed. Our suggestion is that it may be better to think of his resurrection as a mystery which cannot be contained within the normal limitations of the historical and is more than historical rather than something which is ahistorical and removed from our history altogether.

It is the same Jesus who was raised who appeared to the disciples and the first witnesses of Easter. If this was not the case there would be no

significance in the appearances. The appearances are significant precisely because they are appearances of Jesus whom the disciples knew to have been dead, and as such they point to the fact of his having been raised from the dead by God. Although strange and elusive, they must be regarded as historical events since those who witnessed them remained firmly within our history - the appearances have a specific spatio-temporal location - and what happens in the appearances, namely 'recollection and recognition are the categories of history' (Niebuhr, 1957:175). The resurrection of Jesus is open to indirect historical investigation just because of the intrinsic connections which must exist between resurrection and appearances if the latter are to be significant for the Easter faith. Since resurrection is the pre-condition of the appearances, it must be the case that the resurrection takes place before the appearances. This is an obvious point but it is highly significant since it suggests that the resurrection of Jesus has a 'before' and 'after' structure like the events which we have no hesitation in calling historical. This suggests strongly that his resurrection is to be located within history even though it is significantly different from all the other events of history. The case for this becomes all the stronger when we consider the essential connectedness between Jesus' death and resurrection and its temporal structure.

The resurrection is resurrection precisely because it happened to Jesus who had been crucified and whose body had been placed in the tomb. Continuity between the death and the resurrection is essential if both are to have the significance which the Easter faith finds in them. Moreover, this continuity involves a temporal structure since resurrection comes after the death of Jesus, even if this 'after' is in need of some qualification given that death is not something which is lived through as Wittgenstein pointed out. Death is the end of life and so there is no unbroken temporal continuity between Jesus' death and resurrection. The relation between his death and resurrection cannot be the same as that between, say, the Last Supper and his arrest which are both events within the temporal continuity of his life. Nevertheless, there must be some kind of temporal continuity between death, resurrection and appearances if they concern the same person and exhibit the historical structure of before and after.

It is really very important to stress the historicity of Jesus' resurrection if the Christian hope is not to be disabled and perhaps even emptied of all power in its very foundations. Unless we view Jesus' resurrection as an historical event in some sense it is difficult to see how it can, and why it should, be proclaimed as the resurrection of Jesus

who has a fixed place in our history as the one who was crucified at a certain place and time. Pannenberg (1968a:99) puts the matter bluntly:

> If we would forego the concept of a historical event here, then it is no longer possible at all to affirm that the resurrection of Jesus or that the appearances of the resurrected Jesus really happened at a definite time in our world. There is no justification for affirming Jesus' resurrection as an event that really happened, if it is not to be affirmed as an historical event as such.

Williams (1982:97) denies that the raising of Jesus is 'an event, with a before or after, occupying a determinate bit of time between Friday and Sunday' but this is surely what it must be. If the raising of Jesus is not an historical event in which 'the raising belongs to the same realm of discourse and occurrence as the crucifying' it fails to bring hope to our suffering and dying because Easter takes place in some other sphere. As Lewis goes on to remark:

> A seamlessness and homogeneity link Good Friday and Easter in the gospel narrative. No visible stitching between the two indicates transition from one kind of reference-world to another. It is surely this alone which makes the story of even putative relevance to history's other unsubstitutable victims. Is their hopelessness not reconfirmed by a story which accentuates equally the homogeneity of Christ's death to theirs, and the heterogeneity of his new life both to his death and to their own? (1986:9).

'If the resurrection is not an event in history, a happening within the same order of physical existence to which we belong, then atonement and redemption are empty vanities, for they achieve nothing for historical men and women in the world' (Torrance, 1976:87).

This discussion shows that while Jesus' resurrection is not just another event amongst all the events of history and cannot be fitted without reserve into the category of the historical, nevertheless its own essential structure, as far as it is visible to us, suggests that the resurrection is still most adequately thought about in terms of an historical event. Furthermore, it may well be that theologies which deny its historicity sacrifice (at least theoretically) the power of the

resurrection to bring hope to human mortality. To describe Jesus' resurrection as an historical event may require careful explanation, but at least it has the virtue of keeping his resurrection firmly in contact with the realm of suffering and death to which the gospel brings hope by announcing that in this very sphere Jesus is risen.

(c) Different possible correlates of the Easter faith: the empty tomb as a test case

The core of the Easter faith was that Jesus had been raised from death by God and had been exalted as Lord. As such fellowship had been restored with the risen Jesus and the reign of God which he had proclaimed had come to pass in him. A precise reconstruction of the historical events which lay behind this rise of the Easter faith is not possible and different reconstructions are compatible with the core affirmation. Thus, for example, Wiles (1974:75-76; cf 1982a:59) outlines at least three accounts each of which 'is fully compatible with holding the belief that a God-given resurrection is the answer to human finitude and death, and also fully compatible with that belief being true'. It is the core affirmation which is most important. However, if precise reconstruction is impossible, some aspects of the reconstruction can be established with some confidence; and an examination of some of the more important points about which scholars disagree can help to illuminate what is at issue in the interplay of historical, theological and philosophical considerations. This can be seen with greatest clarity in discussions of the empty tomb.

Although it is often thought that the tradition of the empty tomb is a later tradition which was formed to corroborate the tradition of the resurrection appearances, Rowland (1985:192) argues that the empty tomb material is part of the oldest stratum of tradition and should be taken as the starting point for examination of the resurrection faith in preference to the standard practice of beginning with the appearances based on the primacy of 1 Corinthians 15. He also argues for another reversal of conventional wisdom in suggesting that the materialistic accounts of the risen Jesus in the gospels are an earlier rather than a later part of the tradition designed to counter heresy. Interestingly, Richardson (1958:196) argued some time ago that the discovery of the empty tomb belonged to the very earliest tradition about the resurrection.

Whether the tradition of the empty tomb be early or late the fact that the tomb was discovered to be empty (which many scholars accept as historically probable; see, eg, Rowland, 1985:193) is not conclusive proof

that Jesus was raised from the dead. The 'trembling and astonishment' which came upon the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning according to Mark 16.8 is an indication that the mere emptiness of the tomb could produce several reactions apart from faith. Matthew 28.11-15 tells of an offical Jewish response to the emptiness of the tomb which sought to explain it (thus acknowledging the fact) in terms of the disciples having stolen the body. That this explanation does not really make any sense is at the moment of no consequence: rather what is important is that the emptiness by itself remains fundamentally ambiguous. Therefore, even if the tradition of the empty tomb is very early it still requires the testimony of the witnesses of the appearances before faith in the resurrection of Jesus can emerge. In this sense the appearances are the decisive catalyst for faith since they make clear what has happened in a way which the emptiness of the tomb does not and cannot. However, that the evidence of the empty tomb is inconclusive does not make it irrelevant for resurrection faith. Thus Fergusson (1985:301) rightly observes, against Kueng's claim that since the empty tomb proves nothing '(f)aith in the risen Christ therefore is independent of the empty tomb' (1976:365-66), '(t)o argue that the empty tomb is irrelevant because it cannot verify the resurrection is a familiar non sequitur'. In similar vein Moore (1980:266) complains about the far too hasty assumption that resurrection faith is 'compatible with the presence in Palestine of the bones of Jesus', noting that '(t)he statement that the Resurrection is 'not the resuscitation of a corpse', though perfectly true, has worked as another of those massive obfuscations' which so beset contemporary theology. What both of these authors alert our attention to is the fact that logical fallacies in our thinking may mislead us into thinking that the question of the empty tomb is less significant than it actually is. It may not be decisive in the sense that it sparks off faith, but the possibility remains that it is decisive in that resurrection faith is impossible without it. Thus the empty tomb may be a necessary condition of faith in Jesus' resurrection and of the truth of this faith, even if it is not a sufficient condition. Several comments are called for here.

At the level of historical probability the case for the tomb of Jesus having been empty is strong. It is difficult but not impossible to believe that the women went to the wrong tomb. The chief difficulty lies in the fact that Joseph of Arimathea is firmly fixed in the tradition as the one who buried Jesus and hence the location of the tomb was known (Bode, 1970:173). Moreover, the very fact that the tradition of the empty tomb appeals to the testimony of women is a powerful reason to suppose its

historicity. 'Since women were not qualified to give testimony, it is most unlikely that the first testimony to the risen Jesus would be attributed to women without good cause' (Dunn, 1975:126, cf Wilckens, 1977:116-17).

Even if the women had gone to the wrong tomb, it is still difficult to believe that the body of Jesus lay in the tomb. Almost certainly the production of the body would have dealt a death-blow to the early preaching of Jesus' resurrection, and so the authorities would have had the greatest reason to produce the body if it was available. As we have seen, the location of the tomb was known. Matthew 27.62-66 suggests that the authorities even took precautions to secure the grave. There is room for doubt whether this really did happen since there was every reason to believe that Jesus' crucifixion was the end of the affair, and no reason to suppose otherwise on the part of the disciples or the authorities. Even if the grave was not secured it is still far from clear who would have wanted to remove the body and for what reason. The failure of the authorities to produce the body suggests very strongly indeed that Jesus' grave was empty.

Even for Paul, whose rather different experience of the risen Jesus might be more suggestive of a non-bodily resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus was to be understood quite definitely as a bodily resurrection of some sort. This is clear from the argument of 1 Corinthians 15. It is doubtful if resurrection could have been thought about in any other way at the time. As Rowland (1985:190) puts it, 'the disciples had been convinced that they had seen Jesus alive, and the only appropriate terminology available to them to express this conviction was that he had been raised from the dead, even if his body had still remained in the tomb'. The historical considerations above (and both Moore [1980:266] and Staudinger [1983:325-26] argue strongly that the Turin shroud should be taken more seriously than it is at present as evidence for the empty tomb) give us good reasons to believe that the story of the empty tomb is historically reliable and not simply the product of the fact that nobody could have thought about resurrection in any other terms at the time. Nevertheless, the quotation from Rowland does prompt the question whether it might be possible for us today to think of resurrection without the empty tomb. Since the historical position is not clear it is permissible and important to ask this question.

It is apparent that a proper discussion of the empty tomb involves the interplay of historical, theological and philosophical issues. Philosophical considerations about the identity and continuity of persons will be of crucial significance. Granted that Jesus was personally alive again, our decisions about these philosophical matters will shape the

historical reconstruction we think likely just as much as (and perhaps more than) the historical evidence will influence our anthropology of the resurrection.

As MacKinnon reminds us, '(i)t is very hard indeed precisely to place on the logical map the proposition the Father raised the Son' and to know what is 'its relation to the proposition that the tomb was empty'. He points out that there may be either a strict or a material implication between the two propositions, the difference being that the latter indicates a mere de facto coincidence while the former maintains that 'the truth of the proposition the Father raised the Son is so related to the truth of the proposition the tomb was empty that it is strictly impossible for the one to be true and the other false' (1979c:85-87). An understanding of anthropology which stresses that human being is a psychosomatic unity will tend to favour the empty tomb as a correlate of Jesus' bodily resurrection, while non-bodily approaches which think it possible to have persons without bodies will be able to accept the possibility that Jesus' body did simply decay in the grave. The matter is complex, however, and this is why we said that psychosomatic approaches will tend to favour the empty tomb. Rahner affirms strongly that human being is a psychosomatic unity. Nevertheless, he still believes that Jesus could have been raised bodily even though his body lay in the grave. It is not true that 'the identity of the glorified body and the earthly body is only ensured if some material fragment of the earthly body is found again in the glorified body'. Within this life the material basis of life is constantly changing. Therefore, 'even empirical experience of the corpse in the grave can no longer provide an argument for there having been "no resurrection"' (1981f:120). In addition it is relevant to point out that whatever may have been the case with Jesus, any bodily resurrection which we may look forward to will not be able to use the material of our current bodies whether we expect our resurrection either immediately after death or at the end of time. If we are raised immediately upon death our earthly body still decays in the grave or is consumed by fire, and if at the end of time our bodily dissolution will have been long since complete. This shows that in practice we do conceive of bodily resurrection without empty tombs, and therefore it is possible to conceive of Jesus' bodily resurrection together with the presence of his body in the tomb.

To return to MacKinnon's distinction, it appears that if the tomb of Jesus was empty this was a de facto coincidence rather than a strict implication of the raising of the Son. This conclusion follows from the fact that we can conceive of Jesus' resurrection, and even his bodily

resurrection, even if his body lay in the grave. This means that it does not follow from the fact of his having been raised that the tomb must have been empty. The empty tomb is not a strict implication of the statement that God raised Jesus from the dead. For historical, philosophical and theological reasons (which we discuss more fully later in Section iv) we prefer an account which envisages both bodily resurrection and empty tomb. But this discussion should make us aware that the case for the bodily nature of the Christian hope is not conclusive, nor is it clear just what the historical reconstruction is which best corresponds to this. It also makes clear that there are some very important historical, philosophical and theological issues at stake in the question over the empty tomb, and that, while these cannot be resolved to general satisfaction, nevertheless they can be disentangled with some degree of clarity.

ii The problem and significance of death

Although the Christian hope announces the victory over death established by Jesus' death and resurrection, this does not give us permission simply to skip by death as if it was no longer of any consequence, so that we can get on to speaking about resurrection as quickly as possible. Jesus' resurrection did not cancel out the fact of his death but rather made it especially important for faith. Thus the Easter preaching paid particular attention to the meaning of his death. Indeed, both Juengel (1975:40) and Rahner (1966b:127, but cf 1975a:176) claim that it is only possible to come to a proper understanding of resurrection today if we first come to a renewed understanding of death in terms of Christ's death. Thus, '(t)he correct starting-point for a genuine theology of Easter is probably a correct understanding of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, that is, a true theology of death' (Rahner).

It is all too easy for talk of resurrection to be an evasion of the finality of death (the sense of this will be explained later). This is ironic because it is precisely belief in resurrection as God's new creative act which can allow us to accept this finality and still have hope for life after death. Christian faith holds out the possibility of taking each seriously without detriment to the other. Theology can do this if it does not short-circuit the movement from life through death to resurrection but takes each as having its own proper place. It is important for theology to reflect upon the intrinsic significance that we must all die and that only after death may we come to resurrection. Death cannot be removed from the

context of resurrection but it deserves a treatment of its own. Christian hope neglects a crucial feature of our lives if it fails to help us to find positive significance in death itself. Hope is not simply concerned with life after death but also with life before death and with death itself.

(a) Towards a positive evaluation of death

Research on dying shows that it is very important to find positive meaning in relation to one's impending death (see eg Parkes, 1975:179). Unfortunately Christian theology can make this impossible if it places its major stress on the relationship between sin and death, as does van der Walle: 'However we are to understand the connection between sin and death, at all events it indicates that even from a purely Christian perspective death in itself is simply a non-thing, is purely negative'. He opposes 'the contemporary attempt to accept death as something normal' and questions whether this is really more rational than the fierce protest against death which we find in some people (1984:176, 183). A chief concern in this rejection of death as natural is what he sees as the absurdity of the extinction of the personal. This is an important point to which we shall return. For the moment, however, we wish to point out that the extreme negative character of his account of death makes it impossible for his theology to make the positive contribution to the experience of dying which pastoral involvement with the dying has shown to be so necessary and beneficial. This is all the more unfortunate because his view seems to rest on a mistaken interpretation of the significance of the sin-death scheme for a Christian theology of death.

A Christian theology of death will not overlook the relation between sin and death but it will stress that death is not determined by the reality of sin. The heart of the gospel is that God's grace in Christ triumphs over sin and its consequences. Therefore, death must be thought of primarily in terms of grace and of what Christ has made of it. A negative view on death often appeals to Romans 6.23 in which Paul begins: 'For the wages of sin is death'. However, this fails to reflect the fact that the verse immediately continues: 'but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Juengel, 1975:61, 89). In other words, at the very heart of Christian faith we find a refusal to allow sin to have the upper hand over grace. A Christian theology of death will refuse to characterise death in entirely negative terms because it must see it in the fundamentally positive light of what Christ has made of death through his acceptance of it and his use of it as his final obedience to God. The

Augustinian legacy perhaps has given Western Christianity too much of a negative concern with death. By contrast a Irenaean eschatological view allows us to see death as a necessary part of a voyage to something greater in the future rather than the product of a deficiency in the past (Hick, 1973:152, cf Rahner, 1969:35). The story of Christ's death and resurrection makes it eminently possible to understand death in this way. If we reflect upon the relation between life and death we can discover further aspects of the positive significance of death which Christian faith should encourage.

Death is written into the fabric of life. The world is a continual movement of life and death in which death plays a necessary part in making sure that life is sustained by creating both the space and the raw material for future forms of life. This is true also on the much vaster scale of the universe in which old stars die and their death becomes part of the ongoing shaping of the physical universe as energy is not lost but conserved. Life on the earth is inconceivable and would be impossible without the constant work of death. Our dying makes way for future generations to enjoy the earth. Therefore death preserves the ecological balance necessary for life. We have only a partial grasp of the factors involved in ageing but scientific research suggests the presence of 'fixed genes' which switch on and off at certain stages during the human life span (see Anonymous, 1982). This suggests that ageing and death are programmed. These observations make it much more plausible that death is an intended and natural occurrence rather than some disastrous invasion of a universe in which God never intended there to be any death. In the Old Testament both life and death are in the hands of God and in this way death is demythologised (cf Juengel, 1975:72-73). It is not, as for Israel's neighbours, a cruel power which fights against man. 'It is simply the end of life, determined by God, and to be as readily accepted at his decision as the gift of life itself' (Eichrodt, 1967:500).

The fact that we must all die need not be experienced as something negative. Birth and death mark out the boundaries of human finitude and provide a structure within which we can live, plan our life, and set ourselves realistic tasks. In this way the knowledge of our finitude marked by death helps to make life more purposive and meaningful. Death also completes our life, rounds it off, and gives it some final achieved shape. A life without a death 'would be like a sentence that wandered on for ever and never came to a full stop so that we never learn the sense of it' (Macquarrie, 1982:238).

Although some instances of death do call into question the meaningful-

ness of life, for the most part death does not make life meaningless. Therefore the statement by Sartre that 'Death removes all meaning from life' must be rejected as an unwarranted pessimism. Hepburn (1982:139, 140) calls our attention to the fact that many of the metaphors which we use for death are one-sided and that when we allow the use of several metaphors to correct this we see that 'there is no valid inference from recognizing the limits imposed by death to the thoroughgoing devaluation of the activities' of life. The things we have achieved, the friendships we have enjoyed, the growth of a humane person and of love within family life are all worthwhile in their <u>own</u> time. Some human achievements may have a finality which cannot be removed by subsequent events (we shall return to this). Here we may think in particular of ethics (but possibly also of the classic achievements of music, literature and art). In any case the fact that one day we shall be dead does not render what we do before our death meaningless or without value can be seen by the use of a simple example. In a series of Lent talks on BBC Radio 4 in 1985, and repeated after his death from cancer in 1986, entitled 'All stations to the cross', the Revd Robert Foxcroft compared life - and especially his experience of dying - to a railway journey. He pointed out how varied were the reactions of friends and acquaintances to the news of his illness, and how some people reacted as if now that the truth was known that was it, 'the game was up' and there was nothing left to play for. Moving to yet another metaphor, this time that of the party, he suggested just how odd this sort of reaction to the knowledge of future death is. He asked his listeners to imagine someone who goes to a party and arranges for a taxi to collect him a few hours later. We would think it very odd, if, when invited to take his coat off and meet the other guests, he declined to do so with the explanation that he would not be staying long. But that is how many people greet the news of death.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the hospice movement has been to make dying a part of living. As the final stage of living it is also a valuable opportunity for personal growth. Even when death is likely in the near future there is still a lot of living to be done. Thus it is insulting to the dying and inappropriate if their visitors never talk about what is happening in the world, as if with the knowledge of their illness they have ceased to have any interest in the continuing life of the world and their former pursuits. 'Although you know that your life expectancy is short, you cannot make that the sole topic of conversation all the time' (Ainsworth-Smith, 1982:25).

While the dying must be allowed to die their own death, Christian hope

ought to encourage the view that the final stage of life is a very valuable opportunity for human growth, and for growth in the human journey towards God in particular.

Death is an invitation to trust since it means that we will not see the future and we will not be here to shape the lives of those whom we care for and to act upon our concerns for the world. We do not know how things will turn out after we have died. We must trust that the things we have lived for will not turn out to have been mistaken and that the task of human living will be able to respond to whatever challenges it comes against. Death forces us to realise that both the verdict upon our own life and the propects for the future lie largely, but not totally, out of our hands.

Death involves a letting go both for the dying and the bereaved. The dying person must let go of his or herself, his or her projects and others. This is an especially difficult thing for those who have been fortunate enough to enjoy a significant amount of control over their own circumstances. However, if life is lived in love then it can be a continual preparation for death. This is because love is a giving away of oneself and a preparedness to let others make of themselves what <u>they</u> choose. Within relationships of love the temporary partings of life can be a preparation for the final parting of death (Hellwig, 1978:87). In this way life and death are brought together very closely and we see the importance of living in such a way that enables us eventually to die. It is very important that we do not leave preparing to die until the final stage of life when death is now close.

The varying circumstances of dying make generalisations dangerous; but since death is so important and people tend to cope with it much better if they can find meaning in it, it is probably better that people should be aware of the fact that they are dying if they want to know (Rahner, 1981e: 105). Research amongst the dying suggests that as many as 80% would prefer to be told that they are dying while some 80-90% of physicians only rarely tell patients the truth about their condition (Hinton, 1972:130). Such matters must be approached with great sensitivity, and there are several ways in which a dying person can be helped to an awareness that he or she is dying. The dying person receives many clues to how seriously ill he or she is (see eg the list in Ainsworth-Smith, 1982:21) and we should not underestimate the extent to which he or she may be aware of the terminal nature of the illness and may, in fact, be hiding this to protect others. As Hinton puts it: 'For those ill people who wish to draw conclusions about their chances of recovery, the signs are usually there'. When people

recognise that they are dying, and they are helped to prepare for death and reassured about it in various ways, often they are able to accept it with considerable calm. Having related the calm manner of Spinoza's death, Hinton remarks: 'It may seem that only an exceptional person could show such saint-like courage and calm as death approached, but the next chapters, showing the way that ordinary folk die, will show that this is no rare virtue' (1972:100, 49 contra van der Walle, 1984:182, 'We simply cannot accept death because we somehow recognize that death is violent and therefore unnatural'.) It is significant support for our contention that death can be seen in a fundamentally positive light that so many of those who work with the dying find that their experience of dying people adds to their sense of the dignity of human being.

If human life is a journey towards God death is well suited to elicit an appropriate final commitment of our lives into his hands. By its very nature it is an invitation to commit ourselves into the hands of God. It is the obscureness of death which makes this possible as Ward (1982a: 134-35) indicates:

> There is surely a deep purpose of God in leaving death as a barrier beyond which we cannot go. It need not have been so. It is part of the purpose of this world that we should act and commit ourselves, in ignorance of what, if any, larger context gives overall meaning to our lives. We are asked to commit ourselves to the love of God, in the darkness of suffering and death.

This is the positive theological significance of the fact that we all have to die not knowing what it is to die. Death is the supreme theological moment of Christian hope because it exhausts all our human possibilities (Rahner, 1975a:177). If the darkness of death is an invitation to commit ourselves to the mystery of God, the powerlessness of death means that we can trust only in God. However, it is most important to stress that the work of death will be frustrated if the trust and hope which it invites is corrupted into a form of self-seeking. When death is used properly it can be the occasion in which we give ourselves to God unconditionally. In death we must love God for his own sake. Commitment to God is quite different from grasping after our own survival and on our own terms.

In his death Jesus shows us what it is to commit oneself unreservedly into the hands of God. For Christian faith, because of his death and resurrection, death is not a fall into nothing but 'into the hands of the

living God' (Rahner, 1969:87-88). Beyond the end of our lives there is not nothing but rather God. (Therefore the sense in which a Christian can talk of death as final excludes the possibility that there is nothing after death, which is often the meaning intended outside of theology and even by theologians sometimes.) 'This is something which we have to learn and try to understand: it is not only the beginning which constitutes a blessing; the end is also an act of grace' (Juengel, 1975:90).

(b) The unfinished business of death

So far we have been trying to give reasons why death should be seen and valued as a positive feature of life. This is an important task given modern culture's silent but nevertheless eloquent fear of death, to which Christian theology may all too easily, though unwittingly, contribute. But the problem with our account so far is that it is highly idealised and corresponds only partially to how most people experience their own mortality. Our account of death would seem most applicable to those who live long, happy and successful lives in which the person truly flourishes, expecting and preparing for death; and even in these cases our account is only partially applicable.

It is often said that one of the problems with death is that it leaves too much unfinished business. Christian theology has a quite specific interest in this. If God is concerned to make persons this life leaves too much unfinished business. 'We are thus reminded that the tautology that we can see life as a whole, and see the meaning of that whole, only when the life has terminated, is in some cases merely trivial and unilluminating' (Hick, 1973:154, cf Hepburn, 1982:141).

Even in cases where the person has lived a happy, successful and relatively long life there can still be a feeling that one has only just started on the business of becoming a person. In a sermon shortly before his death Lampe (1981b:136) gave expression to this:

> So, at the heart of our life there is unfulfilled hope, a promise and an assurance of the transformation of ourselves into the image of God, in which, potentially, we have been created. That transformation cannot be completed in these few years of life; and if those years are all that there is for us, such glimpses of God as we now have are like a springtime without a summer to follow it.

If this is true of a very successful life it is all the more true of those whose lives have been cruelly cut short or severely curtailed by their circumstances. It is significant that the problem of theodicy seems to have been a germinative factor in the emergence of belief in life after death in Israel (see Eichrodt, 1967:496-529; Jacob, 1958:299-316). Theodicy is a very powerful argument for the necessity of life after death. Ward (1982b:201) believes that theism would be falsified without it since 'then there could be no justification for the existence of this world' in which suffering and evil loom so large. It is, as MacKinnon (1963:265) puts it, that 'we would beg the world that it does not treat our agonies as nothings'.

The pressure of the logic of Christianity's conviction that God is concerned with the emergence of the personal towards belief in life after death can be seen in another way. If this is God's concern it would be inconsistent to think that death meant 'the utter extinction of those relationships of love, developed so gradually, so profoundly and yet with such tantalizing incompleteness' (Wiles, 1974:137). But even if we could imagine a situation in which God's person-making work was complete at the end of a person's life, it would be even more inconsistent if God then allowed this personal existence to slip from his grasp into nothingness at death (see Hick, 1973:146). In other words, once we admit that God is concerned with the creation of the personal, and that this is really what our lives are about, there is no way of avoiding the conclusion that such a conviction points to the reality of life after death. The belief in life after death is not just a product of the incompleteness of life. The incompleteness takes on importance in the light of the fundamental personal purpose of God.

Two important conclusions emerge from this discussion. First, while Christian hope will find positive meaning in death itself, the logic of its own position will cause it to look beyond death. Therefore it finds hope in death itself and in life after death. Second, the Christian belief in life after death is not grounded solely in Christ's death and resurrection. These are fundamental for such a hope but they ought to be taken together with our wider experience of being human (Wiles, 1974:132), in which our experience of the love of God and of the problem of suffering will be especially important (Sykes, 1976:261), and our experience of the world (thus Ward [1982a:120, 134] lists the love of God, the resurrection of Jesus, and the spirituality of matter as the three main reasons why a Christian is committed to belief in immortality). Together these make up a powerful and coherent argument for the belief in life after death because

they all confirm God's purpose of creating the personal. It is now time to explore the ultimate metaphysical basis of the Christian hope for life after death in Christ's death and resurrection.

iii God, death and resurrection

Christ's death and resurrection form the central mystery of the Christian faith. Every theology which tries to understand what happened there quickly discovers just how little it really understands. Indeed, if it is to be true to the task a theology of Christ's death and resurrection must leave us with a certain sense of confusion, failure and bewilderment. We do well to be suspicious of theologies which are too confident and too nicely worked out in the presentation of a neat solution. Theologies which never doubt their own power and betray no sense that most of their content is relative and precarious, and could be quite mistaken, cannot lead us into the mystery of Easter.

Of course, theology cannot make its inevitable failure here an excuse for not making every effort to understand. Several different approaches are possible and desirable, differing according to the interplay of the decisions which different theologians make about some of the key issues. Thus, for example, rather different theologies of passion and resurrection emerge because the selection of key interpretive theological categories varies from relationlessness (Juengel) to abandonment and contradiction (Moltmann) to death as an act of summation (Rahner/Boros, 1965; 1970). As we shall see, each of these has its merits and its faults, and perhaps a theology of death and resurrection has to find room for all of them. There are valuable resources in both the biblical and later Christian traditions which help us to gain some 'entry into at least the outer edges of the ontological mystery of the crucified and buried God' (Lewis, 1986:18). It is possible to see that some accounts seem better fitted than others in terms of their faithfulness to the original story, their resonance with key ideas in the tradition and their internal theological coherence. Likewise we can see that some accounts must be rejected because their internal strains are too great or they contradict central Christian affirmations about God, or are fancifully speculative with insufficient roots in the tradition.

However, even the more 'successful' attempts must not be deceived by their apparent power. The discussion will be best served if each attempt remembers that it is only an attempt, only an indication of something which

can never be grasped properly. It is more likely to be able to do this the more self-consciously critical it becomes of the key decisions which influence its construction. Each attempt must try to be aware of the assumptions it makes, the models which it uses, and the metaphorical nature of much of what it says including some of its apparently less metaphorical conceptual apparatus.

In what follows we try to use some key theological notions in the Christian tradition which seem best suited to illuminating Christ's death and resurrection. Then we try to develop this in a more differentiated and self-consciously trinitarian fashion. In the third sub-section we look at the problem of Holy Saturday. Although generally neglected in contemporary theology, there is a good case for seeing Holy Saturday as the test case of how seriously a theology takes the fact that the mystery of Easter relates God first to death and only then to resurrection. In our discussion of this we will see just how disturbing and elusive the search for an understanding of death and resurrection is. Finally, in a fourth sub-section, we shall discuss the theological significance of the risenness of Jesus. This is of crucial significance for the practice of Christian hope and is much wider than (but certainly includes) the hope for life after death.

(a) Love, creation and resurrection

As we saw in our first chapter, the New Testament is quite convinced that Jesus gave his life out of love for his Father and his kingdom, and that the Father gave his Son out of love for the world. The Father raised the Son because he loves him and the world for which the Son died. Moreover, the Spirit by whom the Father raised the Son, and in whose strength Jesus carried out his mission, is the Spirit by whom God goes out of himself eternally, creates the world, and sheds his love abroad in the hearts of the Christian community. Therefore Augustine's comment should not surprise us: 'Give me a lover and he will understand the resurrection' (see O'Collins, 1978:82). Resurrection is a response of love to love. The mystery of passion and resurrection is above all the mystery of the self-giving love of God.

The love of God is essentially creative. As will become clearer shortly, in both the obedience of the Son and the response of the Father something creative is done. Indeed, it is one of the most important of the consequences which flow from Jesus' unity with God that his passion, and what it achieves for us and our dying, must be seen as the saving creativity of God. Salvation and creation are ultimately one in the Bible

and in the Eastern church especially there has been a strong stress on Easter as the first day of the new creation.

The resurrection of Jesus must be seen as deriving from the fact that he hands over his life to the creator who has power over life and death. The doctrine of God the creator is the fundamental context within which we should think of Jesus' death and resurrection. Scott (1978:175-78) is correct in pointing out that part of the weakness of Moltmann's account of death and resurrection lies in his attempt to construct the doctrine of God too exclusively on the basis of a theologia crucis, and his disregard of wider considerations, drawn particularly from the Old Testament and philosophical theology, which might enable him to have a metaphysical framework not independent of the cross, but one which would both help us to understand the cross with greater power and coherence, while also being constantly questioned by what the cross does tell us about God. In other words, the theology of the cross needs to be brought into a more creative relationship with some of the wider concerns of the traditional theological agenda. This is a criticism of contemporary theologies of the cross which has a wider relevance and application than just to the work of Moltmann. Thus when Juengel (1983:218) says that: 'A theology of the Crucified One does not abstract itself from creation - precisely the opposite, it establishes proper theological talk about God the creator', we are bound to agree, but the immediately following remark that 'such a theology is not to be designed on the basis of a theology of creation' shows that he is thinking only in one direction and not of a creative dialogue between the two. But it is surely precisely this creative dialogue which is exhibited from the New Testament onwards, and which makes the grasping of Jesus' death and resurrection as the focal point of our knowledge of God possible in the first place. Bringing together the doctrines of Trinity and creation we may say that it is because God is in himself a life of intrinsically creative relationships that death can be transformed into everlasting life beyond the power of death when he takes death upon himself in the person of Jesus. Tillich's interpretation of the power of God as 'the eternal possibility of resisting non-being' (1978c:385) is suggestive here, for as Kasper (1984:195) puts it:

> Because God is the omnipotence of love, he can as it were indulge in the weakness of love; he can enter into suffering and death without perishing therein. Only thus can he redeem our death through his own death.

In the light of this we have to be a little critical of the talk of 'God risking his own being' which we sometimes find in accounts of the cross. Thus, for example, MacKinnon (1976:99) says of Christ's passion that 'in it the very being of God is put at risk'. Torrance (1982:196) remarks that this 'reveals an almost unparalleled realism in his Christology'. Barth (1956:185, 253) too said that the incarnation of God 'means His giving Himself up to the contradiction of man against Him, His placing Himself under the judgment under which man has fallen in this contradiction, under the curse of death which rests upon him'. In the Son God is found 'treading the way of sinners to its bitter end in death, in destruction, in the limitless anguish of separation from God . . . the non-being, the nothingness to which man has fallen victim'. For Juengel death is the simile for nothingness and in the passion God struggles against nothingness. 'In that God identified himself with the dead Jesus, he located nothingness within the divine life' (1983:211, 219).

Our reason for questioning this manner of expressing the passion is that, on grounds of the doctrine of creation, death is always under the control of God. Death and God are not two rival powers, either of which might have won. Juengel himself points out that both the Old and New Testaments demythologise death, but there seems to be the danger of a 'mythological' view reappearing in his use of 'nothingness'. It is difficult to know how fair this is since the meaning he wishes to give to 'nothingness' is not clear (see later). In any case the authors who employ the language of risk and add that 'God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away. He does not give up being God' (Barth, 1956:185). Or as Juengel puts it: 'God is that one who can bear and does bear, can suffer and does suffer, in his being the annihiliating power of nothingness, even the negation of death, without being annihilated by it'. Therefore, it is surprising to find him denying that talk about the death of God is a metaphor. It can be argued that all of our talk about God is metaphorical. Even if that is contested it must be the case that talk about the death of God is metaphorical since while we are apparently overcome by death, it is impossible, and this is vital for Christian hope, that God should be overcome by death. In other words, an insistence upon the metaphorical nature of talk about the death of God points to the vital difference between what happens when we die and when God dies, ie when God maintains his unity with Jesus even in death, since talk simply of the death of God is not yet incarnational and trinitarian. Juengel would certainly like the way we have put things in this last sentence. In denying the metaphor Juengel seeks to affirm that the death is real. Indeed, he points out

against the so-called 'death of God' theology that it failed singularly to take seriously the unity of death and God which is found at the heart of Christian faith. Its fundamental weakness is that 'a real death cannot be thought at all' (1983:219, 217, 204-05). This concern is very important.

Talk of God 'risking his own being' is an attempt to take seriously the death of Christ as an event for God. Theological realism is absolutely necessary here, and this is why the next sub-section is devoted to Holy Saturday. Any theology which fails to indicate the total self-giving of God in Christ's passion, and the costliness of this in its impact upon the life of God, must be considered seriously deficient. That is why we wish to be only 'a little critical' of such talk. Its intention is absolutely correct even if it may induce some significant misunderstandings.

(b) The work of Father, Son and Spirit

Death becomes the way to resurrection through the human achievement of Jesus together with the response of the Father. Various models which trade on well-established notions in the theological tradition can be used to give us some idea of how this might be understood. In what follows the notion of relationship will be a key theological category. There are three reasons for making this choice. First, the work of death and resurrection is a work of love and love is concerned essentially with relationships. Second, the work of death and resurrection is the work of the triune God and this understanding of God involves relationships at its very heart. Third, going back to statements in the Old Testament which are developed in the New Testament, a central Christian understanding of death has been that death is the loss of relationship with God, the final form of our alienation in our turning away from the source of life in God (see eg Juengel, 1975:78-79; Rahner, 1969:71). Therefore it is this negative aspect of death which must be overcome in Christ.

Jesus' death was the final act of his obedience to God. If we may look upon his whole life as a living in commitment to God, his death is the supreme instance of this and offers everything in trusting surrender to God. Therefore, in his life the turning away from God which characterises the human situation and leads to death in its negativeness is radically reversed. Moreover, in his case death is no longer the final seal and sign of our estrangement from God. Rather, Christ has fashioned death, or refashioned it if we prefer, making it what we have suggested earlier it was always intended to be, namely, that act of complete and unconditional

self-surrender to the mystery of God which gathers up the whole of our life. In other words, the obedience of Christ's life and death breaks the viciousness of the connection between sin and death and creates the possibility of a new relationship with God.

Given the ability of this approach to illuminate Christ's death in terms of the biblical and later tradition, and its obvious capacity to state Christ's death for what it clearly is, namely his final act of obedience, it is not surprising to find that Rahner (especially 1969:48-49, 62, 70; also eg 1974a:320-21), deeply influenced by Heidegger, has made this the focus of his theology of death. It is surprising to find that Juengel (1975:91) dismisses Rahner's notion of death as a final act rather hastily. Webster (1986:92) points out that Juengel's account is so overwhelmingly theocentric that it makes it difficult to see how death can be a mutual relationship between God and man. Because his approach is dominated by the thought of death as the limit set by God he can only see the human person in the passive role of the one who suffers death. Thus Juengel writes that 'the activity of God in bringing to an end does exclude human participation'. When he ends his book on Death by saying that '(d)eath must be and must become what Jesus Christ has made it: the limit to man which is set by God alone' (1975:91, 136), we see that the door which could have led to a greater and more balanced stress on Jesus' active obedience in death is immediately closed again. A theology of death and resurrection which really is incarnational ought to be able to give full place to both Jesus' achievement in death and the role of the Father. It will disagree with Juengel's approach which seems to assume that the activity of God excludes the activity of the human person. Jesus' acceptance of death is the human expression of our dependence upon God but as such it is an active expression. It is true that death does make us all passive as we lose our hold on life (and this is why Jesus cannot achieve resurrection on his own; only the Father can accomplish this) but this does not prevent us from being able to see a most important active accomplishment in Jesus going to his death and his enduring of it.

The obvious question which arises from our account of the significance of Jesus' obedience in death is whether this approach can face squarely the possibility that his faith in God may have collapsed upon the cross. McIntyre (1962:206) is emphatic that Jesus did not lose his faith but many others would be less certain (eg Juengel, 1975:105). It may be that if Christ did anticipate and accept his death as part of his mission, and there is a good case for this as we have seen, his faith is more likely to have held up. But as MacKinnon reminds us about the Last Supper, 'the

context is desperately human; it is a moment of confident glory that passes immediately into prolonged bewilderment, fear, pain, defeat'. The defeat in itself is not necessarily a problem for Rahner's approach since, as MacKinnon also remarks, it may be precisely his acceptance of defeat from the hands of God which is Jesus' ultimate achievement:

> It is Christ who accepts the human situation as it is, and who, by his acceptance, not only defines that situation, but provides the expression within the limits of concrete human existence of the very inwardness of God himself (1979h:179; 1979b:67. Cf 65; 1968a:81).

However, perhaps the notion of Jesus' being able to accept defeat is in itself an attempt to save the dignity of Jesus, leaving him more in control than many would be in a similar situation and more than we can be sure was the case in his death. Moltmann (1981:79) reacts strongly against attempts to save Jesus, believing that they deprive the Christian hope of its real depth and power. Comparing some contemporary attempts with the early Fathers' attempts to preserve Christ's divinity from the harshness of the cry of dereliction, he writes:

> And modern theologians are just as wrong when they try to preserve Jesus' inward faith against all the appearances of despair. By doing so they only make Jesus a pattern for faith in the sense of the motto 'despairing yet consoled'; and they obscure Jesus as the sacrament of salvation, who through his own forsakenness overcomes ours.

It is interesting that even here it is still Jesus who does the overcoming.

We cannot be sure how Jesus died. There remains the possibility that his faith did collapse. The sacramental approach can face even the most profound defeat because it is more theocentric than exemplary approaches. It has been one of our stresses that Christian hope is truly radical because it can face the exhaustion of all human possibilities precisely because it trusts in God. This should not lead us to throw all the stress on God since even if Jesus finally lost his faith his manner of dying undoubtedly achieved something. If his achievement was his ability to meet his death giving everything over to the Father, including the possibility of his total collapse of faith, and leaving the outcome in his hands, then there is even greater reason to affirm both his achievement and his defeat

and collapse of faith. Moltmann's words may well expose the weakness of Rahner's exclusive stress on Jesus' act of dying but there is still room in Moltmann's approach for Rahner's stress. The real possibility of Jesus' loss of faith, together with his death, shows that a theology of death and resurrection cannot hope to get off the ground if it confines itself to Jesus. This brings us back to a more theocentric stress and with this we come to perhaps the most valuable contribution which Juengel has to make.

Juengel (1976b:88) has learnt from Barth's treatment of the death of the Son the importance of thinking strictly anti-docetically; the resurrection is something which the Father does and which happens to the Son. In the passion the response of the Father is that he never ceases to relate himself to us even in the threatening relationlessness of death. Because he identifies himself with the dead Jesus, God refuses to allow death to cut us off from himself. Rather he goes on relating to us by taking his place beside us in death, so that 'out of the midst of the relationlessness of death there emerges a new relationship between God and man'. This shows that the work of God in the passion and resurrection is a creative work of love. 'For it is when everything has become relationless that love alone creates new relationships' (1975:109, 110). In his much more explicitly trinitarian treatment in the later God as the Mystery of the World, Juengel points out that it is the self-differentiation within the triune being which makes it possible for God to identify himself with the dead Jesus and to define his own being in terms of him. In the cross 'God has interposed himself in the midst of a fatal God-forsakenness in order to create a new relationship with God'. 'God reconciles the world with himself in that in the death of Jesus he encounters himself as God the Father and God the Son without becoming disunited in himself (1983:363, 367, 368).

It is clear that Juengel builds his account upon the key notion of relationlessness which can claim biblical support and his use of the phenomenology of love which requires unity in self-differentiation and does illuminate the doctrine of the Trinity. The power of his account lies in its penetration of the inner logic of the overcoming of death, granted the essential correctness of his model and its pursuit of this in a self-consciously trinitarian fashion; we can see how this could be an exposition which the story of what takes place between the Father and the Son itself invites. However, we need to keep in mind the fact that relationlessness is a metaphor based on our experience of human relationships and their termination by death, and that the notion of God who refuses to allow death to cut us off from himself is also a metaphor based on our experience of

human relationships which are sustained or kept open from one side despite the hostility of the other partner, and on our experience of powerlessness in the face of death's partings. The phenomenology of love is asked to do a lot of work for contemporary theologies of the cross (eg Juengel, Kasper, Moltmann) and perhaps understandably so. We must remember, nevertheless, that we are dealing with relationships between God and ourselves, or Jesus, and not between two human beings. The difference between the two introduces an uncertainty into the discussion, in addition to the uncertainty over whether the selection of models and metaphors is appropriate. Granted that we are obliged to use metaphors and models, we cannot expect to be able to say just exactly what the sense of our words is, especially here. Despite this, the metaphor can still be very illuminating. In Juengel's thought the necessary and unavoidable uncertainty is compounded by a failure we sometimes suspect to make his meaning as clear as he might do. Thus, for example, it remains unclear just what the business of God relating himself to us in death means, and what he thinks happened to the Son in death. What is the God-forsakenness which Jesus experiences and how is this to be put together with the fundamental assertion that God continues to relate to him? Juengel's treatment of the work of the Father is illuminating but it leaves us puzzling about some rather fundamental questions, his treatment of which remains obscure at some crucial points. We shall return to this in the next sub-section.

It is noteworthy that it is the Spirit who strengthens Jesus for his ministry and passion, and by whom the Father raises him from the dead. The Spirit is the power of God at work both in creation and new creation. There is, as we have seen, a genuine difficulty in articulating a theology of the Spirit because of the hiddenness of the Spirit. It is noticeable that Juengel's doctrine of the Spirit is the least well-developed element of his trinitarian theology of the cross (see the brief discussion in 1983:374-76). If 'relation' is central to death and resurrection, then the Spirit as God's relating both within and outside of himself would seem to be particularly important for the theology of death and resurrection. It is the Spirit as the 'eternal and inexhaustible outgoingness and life-givingness of God' who makes both death and resurrection possible. To this we must also return.

One final but important point should be made about the trinitarian theology of 'God, death and resurrection'. It is, it seems, an inescapable point and yet one which possibly only modern theology has really been able to appreciate: because God <u>is</u> love and the passion and resurrection call forth from God the most radical exercise of the love which Father, Son and

Spirit are in their relationships with each other, cross and resurrection lead to an increase in the divine being itself. Juengel (1983:368) puts it like this:

> The theology of the Crucified One is speaking, then, of a heightening, an expansion, even an overflowing of the divine being, when it considers God as the total surrender of himself for all men in the death of Jesus.

And Pannenberg (1968a:183) tells us: 'In the vital movement of such reciprocal dedication, the unity of Father, Son and Spirit consummates itself in the historical process of the revelatory event' (cf Macquarrie, 1978b:322).

(c) The theology of Holy Saturday

We have argued that it is most important that the Christian hope does not escape the features of life which make hope difficult. In this chapter we have been suggesting that Christian hope can take death with full seriousness as the end of this life and yet also hope for life after death. Resurrection as God's new creative act makes it possible to affirm the finality of death as the end of all our human possibilities (cf Wiles 1974:128). Yet it is very easy for faith and theology to pass too easily and quickly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. When this is done we not only fail to take our own mortality seriously, but we also fail to take seriously God's own involvement with death.

Undoubtedly part of our difficulty in taking seriously the death at the heart of the life of God is that we know the outcome of the story of Christ's passion from the outset. If the movement of God through death to resurrection is not to be de-historicised, and the death not to be denied its own place and importance, even necessity, we must try to enter back into the story and remember 'how its episodes first unfolded', and in particular the very hopelessness of Jesus' death. Thus, Lewis suggests,

> . . . it is perhaps in the detail of the narrative's second day that the question of salvation and salvation's God comes under closest scrutiny. The very anonymity and uneventfulness of the original Holy Saturday reinforces its narrative function as a sign of termination. Nothing happens, because yesterday all things came to an end and ceased to happen.

The pleonastic 'crucified, dead and buried' of the otherwise economically expressed Apostles' Creed guards against 'the premature encroachment of Easter . . . Death is given space and time to be itself, to be termination, unabbreviated in its malignancy and infernal horror' (1986:11, 10). The danger of neglecting Holy Saturday is that 'perhaps by failing to travel every step of the journey between Good Friday and Easter morning we are depriving the terms "death" and "resurrection" of something of their inner significance' (Rahner, 1971c:151).

Given the potential of a theology of Holy Saturday to impress upon us the reality of the death within God which stands at the heart of the gospel, and which shows the depth and strength of Christian hope, it is perhaps surprising to note how little attention has been paid to this. Theology tends to concentrate upon Good Friday and Easter Sunday and treat the descent into hell as a mythological way of speaking of some aspect of the former (see eg Pannenberg, 1972b:92, 93, for whom the descent 'characterizes the particular kind of experience present in Jesus' death' and is 'the description of Jesus' sufferings'). This leaves Holy Saturday standing in the centre of the central three day drama of Christian faith 'like an unexplored, inexplicable blank spot on the map!' (von Balthasar, 1983:404).

Holy Saturday seems to many a completely inaccessible mystery, impenetrable and inexplicable. Holy Saturday is not spoken about because many feel that it <u>is</u> inexplicable. The darkness of death draws a veil over our understanding of what may happen, if anything, beyond death (cf Collopy, 1978). We cannot see beyond the fact of someone having died and the silence of the gospels about what took place between Jesus' death and his resurrection may perhaps confirm this. If the first reason why many theologians refrain from discussing Holy Saturday is that we <u>cannot</u> know what happens beyond death, the second is that there is <u>nothing</u> beyond death to know about. On this view death means the end of the person and not simply the end of this life. Death is the extinction of personal existence, and so beyond death there is no person to experience to do anything. The notion of 'being dead' is incoherent because it is a contradiction in terms.

Although these are forceful objections to the possibility of a theology of Holy Saturday, they are not strictly insurmountable. On the basis of certain notions found in the Christian tradition, and various preferred models and metaphors, it may be possible to say something which interprets the silence of the second day and which gains a certain amount of acceptance because of its coherence with the rest of Christian belief

and its contribution to a Christian understanding of God. Perhaps with Good Friday and Easter Sunday there is more material evidence, direct and indirect, upon which to base the interpretation, but the task of giving some theological account of Holy Saturday does not seem to be different in principle. The notion of 'being dead' admittedly is difficult, but we cannot be sure that it is impossible. We simply do not know what happens to the person who has died. If we are prepared to adopt a relatively dualistic anthropology of some sort the possibility of personal existence continuing beyond the death of our bodies must be admitted. Many philosophers would defend this approach (see eg Swinburne in Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984). Moreover, as we shall see later, it may be possible to explore Holy Saturday even without the suggestion that one can 'be dead'

In the light of these observations it is interesting to find that it is, as far as we have been able to discover, Roman Catholic theologians, prepared to use a dualistic anthropology at least in so far as they can conceive of a person 'being dead' in a disembodied state, who have offered the most daring recent attempts to expound a theology of Holy Saturday. Thus Rahner (1971b:147) says that the teaching that Christ descended into hell tells us 'about the state of being dead as this applies to him . . . He was not simply the man who died but, over and above this, the man who was in the state of death'. The most important treatment undoubtedly is that given by von Balthasar. In chapter three we shall discuss this in terms of its soteriological thrust towards universalism. Here we wish to point out that he interprets Holy Saturday as an extreme passivity which comes upon the Son and which is the fulfilment of the entire kenotic movement of God through creation, incarnation, crucifixion, and now finds its ultimate term in the Son's 'solidarity in the period of nontime with those who have lost their way from God'. The infinite love of God wins its victory over sin and death by identifying with us, God taking his place beside us in a purely powerless passiveness of the Son:

> Into this finality (of death) the dead Son descends, no longer acting in any way, but stripped by the cross of every power and initiative of his own, as one purely to be used, debased to mere matter, with a fully indifferent (corpse) obedience, incapable of any active act of solidarity - only thus is he right for any 'sermon' to the dead (1983:153).

It is this 'God's going forth into the danger and the nothingness of the creation that reveals his heart to be at its origin vulnerable' (1984b:

356). His preparedness for all of this shows that he is an overflowing of self-giving love, and how much he loves the world.

This account is obviously an imaginative exploration which trades upon 1. our experience of the passivity of dying and death in that we become increasingly inactive, weak etc; 2. traditional notions of a disembodied intermediate state existence, ie that this must be a period of intense activity on the supposition that action requires a body; thus Rahner (1971c:152-53) speaks of the remoteness of the dead person both from others and his or her world and from his or herself; 3. the notion of kenōsis as a key metaphor for understanding not only the coming of the Son, but also the whole movement of God towards the world and indeed the innermost life of God himself (cf 1984b:359, 'his disposition of poverty'). MacKinnon's approval of this is evident when he writes that the doctrine of the Trinity is 'the effort so to reconstruct the doctrine of God that this "descent" may be seen as supremely, indeed paradigmatically, declaratory of what He is in himself'. Indeed, in another place he says: 'It is possible that von Balthasar has already achieved that great work on kenōsis which we need' (1976:102; 1979b:67. Cf McWilliams, 1980:49).

The account is highly speculative and metaphorical, and this means that it is difficult to know what the content is. Von Balthasar admits as much himself in the Preface to his highly acclaimed work on the paschal mystery in the series Mysterium Salutis. We quote from a recent French edition of this: 'Sans doute la kénose du Fils restera-t-elle toujours un mystère non moins insondable que la trinité des hypostases dans le Dieu unique' (1981:9). Some may even think that it is deeply mythological but Riches (1972:652), in a very useful introductory discussion, rejects this strongly. The later Rahner (1981f:123, 120) describes the doctrine of the intermediate state as 'a little harmless mythology' and moves towards a view of instantaneous resurrection immediately upon death: 'So why should we not put the resurrection at that particular moment when the person's history of freedom is finally consummated, which is to say at his death?'. It is not clear what the implications of this change in eschatology are for his understanding of Holy Saturday.

A potentially more serious doubt which arises over von Balthasar's approach is the suspicion that even a minimal account of an extreme passivity in death may still be an evasion of the finality of death, or at least of what the finality of death could mean and does mean for many. Here we should recall our earlier statement that resurrection as God's new creative act may make it possible to accept death in such a way that nothing of the person survives biological death. Although he stresses the

Son's 'no longer acting in any way', we cannot help but feel that the Son's being in hell does possess a certain minimal active component. In any case even a total passivity unqualified in any way by any active component still involves a being there, a survival of death in some minimal fashion. It is notable that Lewis (1986), a Reformed theologian, makes very little use of von Balthasar's work in his paper on 'The Burial of God: Rupture and Resumption as the Story of Salvation', and we may well wonder if the reason for this is perhaps a distrust of von Balthasar's anthropology and the possible evasion of death which it may present.

Once again it is difficult to know what to think about this. The danger of evasion is clear enough but it is very difficult to know if it really is an evasion since we cannot be sure what death does entail for the person. Once again Rahner is an interesting example since in earlier writing he insists that the whole person is subject to death even where the soul survives the body because death has fractured the psychosomatic unity which the person is. This is why Rahner insists upon the resurrection of the body (see eg 1963; 1971b; 1971c). It is because the intermediate state is a prelude to the resurrection of the body, without which the glorification of the person is impossible, for theologians such as von Balthasar and Rahner that we have deliberately described their anthropology as only relatively dualistic. The later Rahner (see especially 1981f:119-24), however, seems to be moving away from the conceivability of an anima separata.

Perhaps inevitably the matter is inconclusive. If it is believed that Jesus' work continued in death then perhaps this can be best indicated by seeking metaphors of passivity, but it must be stressed that these are at best very inadequate attempts to preserve the hidden depth of his death. For our part we wish to explore the possibility of finding metaphors of interruption since these would seem to be less vulnerable to the charge of evasion and more in keeping, in a straightforward sense, with the uneventfulness of Holy Saturday. With the thought of interruption we come back to Juengel. Despite his almost total neglect of von Balthasar (see Louth's comment in 1979:392), and his concentration upon Good Friday and Easter Sunday, his use of 'interruption' as a metaphor for Christ's death is suggestive for our present discussion.

In an essay in which he argues for a view of 'truth as the interruption of the continuity of life', - 'in that something intervenes and is apprehended' - Juengel refers very briefly towards the end to the interruption of the life of God which he permits in the death of Jesus. Death is 'the most acute and effective ontic interruption of the continuity

of human life' in the irrevocable change or loss of possibilities which it brings about in human relationships. Juengel adds in a parenthesis: 'Our own death does not merely interrupt our life; it brings it to an end'. Therefore, Jesus' death is the end of his life and the interruption of the life of God:

> For the cross of Jesus Christ is that event through which the living and eternally alive God accepted death for himself. That this death did not lead to the abrupt ending of the divine life, but only to its interruption, is the consequence of a life and death struggle . . . God reveals himself as love in that he allows his own eternal life to be interrupted by the death of Jesus and thereby confers divine life on the one who is crucified (1976a:233, 236).

It is a little surprising that Juengel does not discuss the death of Jesus in terms of interruption in his major work on God as the Mystery of the World. Although the term 'interruption' does not appear where we might expect it to, it may be that the same idea is present in his use of 'nothingness'. Certainly the theology of death and resurrection in the later work is recognisably the same as that above. 'Talk about the death of God implies then, in its true theological meaning, that God is the one who involves himself in nothingness'. Death is the simile and representative of nothingness, and '(i)n that God identified himself with the dead Jesus, he located nothingness within the divine life'. In so doing he overcomes 'the annihilating power of nothingness . . . in its absolutely undefined and empty state as a negatively virulent vacuum' (1983:218, 211, 222, 219). Despite the fact that he devotes some twenty-six pages (ie 1983:199-225) to 'The Ontological Significance of Christological Talk about the Death of God', it is still difficult to be sure about the meaning of some of the key passages. What happened to the life of God through Jesus' death is beyond any theologian's knowing. All our attempts are only imaginative pictures. Nevertheless, it ought to be possible to state more clearly what we think our pictures are designed to convey and why we want to convey any particular meaning(s) in relation to Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

The metaphor of interruption is certainly promising. It is attractive because it holds out the possibility of interpreting the uneventfulness of Holy Saturday without recourse to the metaphor of passivity (von Balthasar) or to that of breakdown (Moltmann; see our discussion in chapter one). The

former is in danger of not taking the death at the heart of the life of God with full seriousness, while the latter is so concerned to take this seriously that there is a theoretical collapse of the doctrine of God which makes resurrection impossible.

Our suggestion is that Holy Saturday can be approached best if we think of it as a 'temporal interruption in the life of God'. This might mean that we have to think in terms of a 'standing still' in so far as God's embodied self-expression in the Son is concerned between death and resurrection. For this period the dead Jesus, his corpse in the grave, is the focal expression of God's presence in the world. By keeping Jesus in the 'frozenness' of death, the solidarity of God with us in death is given an expression appropriate to his involvement with the world. For the period between Jesus' death and resurrection nothing new happens in the divine relationships between Father, Son and Spirit from the side of the Son. His contribution to the ongoing divine life is simply the totality of his self-giving which is not lost from the divine life with his death but can only remain where it stood on Friday afternoon. The interruption of the divine life is concentrated upon the Son; it is the Son who dies, not the Father or the Spirit. It is an interruption of the whole life of God through the relationships with the Son which constitute the life of the triune God.

We think that this is expressed a little more simply and clearly than Juengel's account. Our statement is very brief and perhaps it does need some expansion, although we suspect that very little can or should be said at the end of the day. It is certainly not free from difficulty. We have tried to indicate how deeply metaphorical it is by the inclusion of quotation marks, thus the key metaphors for interruption (itself a metaphor) are 'standing still' and 'frozenness', but we could easily have included the entire paragraph in such marks. We have tried to indicate something of the 'impact' of the death of Christ upon the life of God in a strictly anti-docetic fashion, and in a self-consciously trinitarian fashion. It is instructive to note how the account tends in the direction of Moltmann's 'breakdown', which we have nevertheless sought to resist. If the issue is pressed it could be argued that since, on our terms, 'nothing new happens in the divine relationships between Father, Son and Spirit from the side of the Son', for us too the life of God has broken down. This would be because, presumably, relationships can only exist if actively participated in from both sides. If this criticism was thought to be successful it might force us back to an account more like that of von Balthasar, although even his account would require modification since at

present the Son's role in death is purely passive. We are not convinced that relationships have to be of this doubly active sort. We might even argue that Jesus' death and resurrection show that it is possible to affirm both that the relationships were not destroyed (the significance of resurrection) and yet that they were 'impeded', 'curtailed', 'suppressed', because the Son was 'trapped' in the 'pure pastness' (cf MacKinnon, 1979c:78) of someone who has died (the significance of death). With this final flourish of metaphors we are trying to stress the seriousness of Jesus' death - the silence and uneventfulness of Holy Saturday - for the life of God which nevertheless overcame and was not overcome.

Theology has always known that Holy Saturday could not have been a day of sheer uneventfulness. In trinitarian thinking about Holy Saturday we must combine passivity or interruption with activity, and indeed without this resurrection would be impossible. Thus Juengel (1976b:88) insisted that the resurrection is the activity of the Father and the Spirit, and something which happens to the Son who is dead. Barth (1956:247) wrote that in the mystery of Jesus' passion 'God is supremely God . . . He is supremely alive'. A trinitarian theology must think in terms of the activity of Father and Spirit towards the Son who is dead. Here we may recall Juengel's interpretation of the Father who continues to relate to the Son in the midst of the relationlessness of death, although we ought to try and clarify this apparently very dialectical expression so that it becomes clear that the relationship between Father and Son did not break down. In particular, however, a proper theology of Holy Saturday will require a strong doctrine of the Spirit.

Lewis argues that 'for all its finality and speechless termination, there is no inert stasis and supine feebleness about the godforsakenness of God, but saving and resumptive dynamism'. In particular:

> If the mortality of the grave, as the inescapable conclusion of the way to the cross, marks the low-point of God's kenosis, then the hopelessness of the grave, as an inconceivable moment on the way to resurrection, inaugurates the high-point of God's plerosis.

This is a very interesting suggestion that the powerlessness of the Son, who has given everything out of love, calls forth the power of Father and Spirit in raising the Son as a response of love to love. This is the nature of love always to respond to even the greatest of challenges by giving more of itself, even finding new resources within itself. It is the

special and distinctive role of the Spirit, considered as a distinct hypostasis, to sustain and overcome the interruption of Holy Saturday. 'The Spirit is God's life enduring, surpassing, but not cancelling the reception of death into his being in the person of the crucified and buried Son' (1986:19, 18, 20, 19, 26-27).

O'Collins (1978-102) comments that despite the efforts of von Balthasar, Boros, Rahner and others 'no firm lines have emerged for a theology of Holy Saturday'. Our discussion has shown how difficult it is to be able to say anything meaningful about Holy Saturday despite the fact that the sense and importance of the questions which have driven our investigation are fairly clear. MacKinnon's remark that Christ's passion is 'a mystery of action that throws into a kind of confusion the assured constants of a traditional metaphysical theology, when we invoke their aid in the effort to represent it' (1979b:67), may be transferred with at least the same force to the problem of Holy Saturday. Even armed with the suggestive resources of biblical and later theological tradition, and drawing upon philosophical concepts and analysis and our wider experience of human relationships, all of which help to gain some understanding of what may be hidden behind the silence of the second day, we are still left with a predominant feeling that we have only a made a very small and precarious amount of progress. The gains are partial, resting on certain metaphors, favouring certain categories and models. The incompleteness of our attempt, which at times threatens to shatter completely as we wonder if any formulation is free from potentially fatal incoherences, may nevertheless be fruitful if it reminds us that at the heart of our faith stands a mystery. The mystery concerns God's overcoming in a situation where death appeared to have silenced all hope. If the limits of our thought are seen as the reverse side of limitless practical achievement, we will have gained some insight to the depth and strength of the Easter faith.

(d) The meaning and significance of the resurrection of Jesus

We have argued that encounters with the risen Jesus are the occasion and primary cause of the rise of the Easter faith. Therefore, it is basic to the meaning of resurrection that Jesus who was dead is now alive, although not simply alive in the sense that he was before but rather alive in a way which puts him beyond the power of death. Jesus' resurrection is quite different from the resuscitation of Lazarus. Resurrection has a personal core - ie the person of Jesus has been raised and he can be

encountered - which is again quite different from saying that his cause was not defeated and lives on. On the contrary, in the New Testament it is precisely because Jesus has been raised by God in the irreducibly personal sense which we have indicated that it is possible to claim that he was not defeated, indeed that his cause not only lives on but also triumphs. This point needs to be stressed since several interpretations of resurrection quite mistakenly seek to remove this. The meaning of the statement 'Jesus is risen' 'tends to be neglected or treated ambivalently'. In basic agreement with our approach Fergusson (1985:288) goes on to reject the radical interpretation of Bultmann and others which thinks of Jesus' resurrection as being the event of the rise of the Easter faith (1985:287, 288). The two belong together, and the former can be approached only through the latter, but plainly the former is not the same as the latter.

The other approach which the irreducibly personal core of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection would seem to rule out is that of process theology. Thus Pittenger (1980:61-70, 80) outlines a view of 'God as Recipient' in whose vital memory we are kept safe. To say that God raised Jesus from the dead is to think of him 'abiding for ever in "the bosom of the Father"'. In a similar fashion Ogden (1976:206) suggests that 'the symbols of resurrection and immortality must be taken as pointing not to some other life beyond this life but to the abiding significance in God of this life itself . . . imperishably united with all creation into his own unending life'. Our judgement must be cautious and tentative here because it is difficult to know whether or not this could be a vehicle for conveying the resurrection of Jesus; so much depends upon the extent to which the notions of being kept safe in God's vital memory and of 'the abiding significance in God of this life' allows for Jesus himself or ourselves being active subjects.

The apparent deficiencies in the radical and process interpretations highlight the importance of making it clear that the resurrection of Jesus involves his presence as an active ongoing subject in the eternity of God which also embraces our world and its history, and that the resurrection of the dead involves their personal, active participation in God's eternity. We must not disappear from the picture. Thus Juengel (1983:215) tries to secure his thought against 'misunderstandings along the line that the eternalizing of a lived life meant the setting aside of my person as the subject of my life' (see discussion of this in Webster, 1986:92; Hebblethwaite, 1979:59; 1984:195-96; Lash, 1979c:171).

We have stressed the fact that resurrection must mean that Jesus was personally alive beyond his death. This was necessary because at least

some theologies of resurrection apparently deny this, and this seems to us to be unsatisfactory because Christian faith originated from and has been constantly sustained by a strong sense of the presence of Christ himself. However, the meaning of Jesus' resurrection is trivialised if it is simply translated as a man who was once dead now being alive. The resurrection of Jesus means his exaltation and Lordship. It is to the theological significance of this that we must now attend.

When Juengel (1983:364) says that '(t)he kerygma of the Resurrected One proclaims the Crucified One as the self-definition of God', he points us to the central theological content of the Easter faith. The central significance of the resurrection of Jesus is not what it says about the individual's hopes for life after death, important as this is, but rather what it tells us about God. The fact that Jesus' resurrection was taken to mean his exaltation as Lord shows that we must try to understand it primarily for what it says about God and his relation to the world. Jesus' resurrection tells us that Jesus is God's way of saving the world.

In raising Jesus from the dead God shows that sin and evil, suffering and death do not have the final word, despite the fact that this is how it must have appeared when Jesus was crucified. The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus and the manifestation of his own righteousness (cf Hunter, 1973:162; Selby, 1976:170-71). 'Resurrection faith is not primarily a matter of believing in life after death, but of believing in the living God and in his unshakeable faithfulness and total commitment to his creation and to man in life in death and beyond death' (Kane, 1980:121). Kaesemann's bold claim that 'apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology' (1969e:102; see discussion in Dunn, 1977b:316-25) is intended to express just this, namely, as Meeks (1974:76) puts it, the driving force of the 'question of God's righteous lordship on this earth'. Thus 'in the Bible resurrection is not primarily taken in the anthropological sense as life out of the grave, but the beginning of the new age' (Kaesemann, 1978b:14). Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus is the beginning and promise of the final victory of God's righteousness which awaits the general resurrection of the dead (see eg 1 Corinthians 15.20-28).

By showing the world that Jesus is his beloved Son and announcing his victory God lets it be known what sort of actions save the world. By identifying with Jesus he puts his seal of approval upon his life and death as the way in which the world is to be saved. Most of all the resurrection points to the costly self-giving love of Jesus. The importance of the fact that it was the crucified Christ whom God raised is that 'it is no other power than the power of love which finally comes to rule, and love which it

is intended should hold sway' (Wilckens, 1977:124). When the early Christian hymn said:

> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2.5-11).

it brought together in a remarkable fashion the various strands of the theology of resurrection which we have been articulating. In particular it impressed upon the early Christian communities the importance of carrying the cross of Christian discipleship by their preparedness for self-sacrifice. This shows us something of enormous significance for a proper grasp of the meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection: Jesus' resurrection does not leave his crucifixion behind but rather confirms that the willingness to be crucified, and naturally its equivalent today, is the measure of the kind of discipleship which is truly a following of Christ, and which therefore can share in his ongoing self-giving in the world. The cross is <u>the</u> model for the kinds of actions which can save the world. Jesus' ministry in the world continues and wherever 'there is salvation, its name is Jesus; its grammar is the cross and the resurrection' (Williams, 1982:72).

The resurrection should cause us to examine the story of Jesus' life and passion, and the post-resurrection encounters, to see what kind of practice is involved in saving the world. If we do this we shall find that there is no saving the world from a safe distance. The world can only be saved if we are prepared to place ourselves where it cries out for hope and salvation. Let us take an example. In Britain today we have become painfully aware of the need for hope and salvation in our inner cities. Outbreaks of violence and the breakdown of communities have forced us into recognising how urgently action is required. The Report of the Archbishop's Commission, <u>Faith in the City</u> (1985), has much to say to the church, the government and the people of our society about what needs to be

done here. It does not require much imagination to see that any significant improvement in community life in places such as Handsworth or Southall will depend upon a genuine involvement with the people of such communities, a preparedness to listen to them and work with them, and a preparedness to give them the chance of a better future by the better off sacrificing some of their wealth and privilege so that more resources might be available where these are needed most. Much self-sacrifice in terms of time, energy, income, standard of living, how and where we choose to live may be necessary if the less fortunate of our society are to have a better life. Certainly forgiveness and reconciliation will be crucial to keeping hope alive in searching for new forms of community. The potential of resurrection to bring hope to such situations should now be apparent immediately since these are at least some of the kinds of involvement which Jesus' lfe and death might suggest to us when we try to reflect in a Christian way upon the problems and possibilities of our inner cities.

If this is a very 'political' example of the practice of the Easter faith the choice is deliberate. Resurrection is inextricably bound up with the search for righteousness on the earth, and as soon as we start to search for that we must reckon with the social and economic and political choices which determine the conditions of life. Attempts to de-politicise the resurrection faith turn out not infrequently to be an evasion of the costliness of conflict. But this is precisely what Jesus refused to withdraw from, and the resurrection, in sending us back to the cross and out to the world where Christ is still crucified, reminds us that this is so. Complex questions are involved in the relation between Christian faith and political practice. The interpretation of resurrection by the use of a contemporary socio-economic and political problem is not meant to deny this, nor is it meant to suggest that the practice of resurrection is <u>all</u> about politics. We shall discuss the inter-relation between faith and politics in considerable detail in the final chapter.

The resurrection suggests the importance of the church and the sacraments for the practice of Christian hope. This is because, in pointing to Jesus, it reminds us that God's grace is mediated through concrete human involvement. The church ought to be the local presence of Christ. The church has perhaps a unique opportunity in that she has a presence in almost every area. The church is a community which ought to be in herself a new kind of community, and ought to promote experiments with new forms of community in her area. Central to the life of the church is the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection in the eucharist. This ought to be used to strengthen hope. The celebration of the eucharist should keep hope

alive and remind us of the kind of commitment required. If church and eucharist are to perform this role it will be very important that we re-think both so that the connections with the life of the surrounding locality, and the wider world, are made more explicit.

The meaning and significance of Jesus' resurrection can thus be seen to be very wide indeed. In fact, Jesus' resurrection amounts to a call to re-think God, the task of being human, and our understanding of the world and how the presence of the church is to be related to this in practice.

The theological significance of Jesus' resurrection for Christian hope is fundamental in three ways. The resurrection of Jesus provides the ground of Christian hope in that it shows us the triumph of God's righteousness. The resurrection is the power or the strength in which Christian hope is to be practised since with it Christ and his Spirit are given, victorious, to the world. As such the victory of life over death already exercises itself so that resurrection is not simply to be awaited beyond death but can be experienced in other ways even now. Finally, in pointing us back to Christ the resurrection provides us with a programme, or at least a sense of direction, for the practice of Christian hope.

iv Life after death

The significance of Jesus' resurrection is much more than the promise of resurrection for us beyond our dying. However, when all the other things have been said, it remains true that the hope for eternal life beyond or after death is an essential feature of the Christian hope. Christians are those who 'look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'. 'Because Jesus gathers up our dying into his own, the character of our dying changes. In communion with Jesus it loses its hopelessness and has already been overcome through the life which has appeared in Jesus' resurrection' (Pannenberg. 1972b:89, cf Rahner, 1961: 67-73, 87-88). The very language of resurrection is deeply significant since the first Christians 'need not have spoken of resurrection or immortality, if their sole concern had been to describe new possibilities of this present life' (Wainwright, 1971:372).

Yet many theologians have expressed important objections from various points of view to the propriety of speaking of life after death. We shall begin by giving a sympathetic reception to these objections and by trying to show how the positive intent of their concerns can be included within

proper Christian talk about life after death. We shall make clear the nature of Christian eschatological statements before discussing three most important features of any Christian eschatology.

(a) The difficulties, suspicions and possibilities of speaking about life after death

We can identify six important objections to talk of life after death in contemporary discussions. We shall indicate these and reply to them briefly:

1 That such talk is a denial or evasion of the finality of death (see eg Lash, 1979c:171). It is true that belief in life after death may cause people to somewhat overlook the fact that we all die and that death has a deeply disturbing impact by bringing to an end, at least in this life, even our closest and most meaningful relationships. However, we have argued that since resurrection is God's new creative act, belief in resurrection makes it possible to accept that death truly is the end of all our human possibilities. Moreover, we have insisted that faith in resurrection must not blind us to the fact that death comes before resurrection and is the unavoidable path which we must tread on the way to resurrection. But the finality of death cannot mean that beyond death there is nothing for Christian hope, since although death may mark the end of all the possibilities of human fulfilment which lie in our hands, it does not mark the end of God's possibilities for us. Here the anthropological significance of Jesus' resurrection is important. The claim that Christian faith avoids the finality of death is not more 'realistic' or 'honest' about death because it cannot be known that there is no resurrection for us (Sykes, 1976:266). 'Claims that it is more "realistic" to concede the finality of death have no place in Christianity, which is centrally concerned with the breaking of the grip of death' (Hebblethwaite, 1984:197).

2 That belief in life after death functions as a false and distracting consolation, whereas hope should be directed to changing the conditions of life here and now. This is the objection to Christian faith which was given classic expression by Marx's characterisation of it as the 'opium of the people'. There can be little doubt that the Christian faith has sometimes functioned in this very damaging

fashion. However, there is no reason why belief in life after death must work itself out in practice in this way. Indeed, in chapter four we shall argue quite the reverse, ie that a proper understanding of Christian eschatology should strengthen our commitment to this world and the improvement of the human condition here and now.

3 That such talk reveals a selfish indulgence and a deeply irreligious self-interest, a wanting to know that we shall be alright. Thus Lampe (1981a:28) raises the question whether the link between salvation and immortality may not be rather self-centred and self-seeking. When Cupitt (1980a:10) says that '(r)eligious activity must be purely disinterested and therefore cannot depend upon any external facts such as . . . a life after death', he is alerting us to the danger that if belief in life after death is a form of self-seeking then it is quite the opposite of true religion (but see the more positive earlier evaluation in 1972:317). But the 'if' is very important. We have tried to ensure that death be understood as an invitation to commit ourselves to the mystery of God. Whatever happens to us is in his hands and in our final act of trust we should give ourselves to him in unconditional love just as Jesus met his own death. Nevertheless, because God is a mystery of love who has raised Jesus from the dead, it is appropriate to believe that such love will also raise us from the dead. Therefore, belief in life after death is not so much a matter of our human self-centredness which must hold on to life for ourselves as it is of hoping for something which is in accordance with the character of God. It ought to be possible to give ourselves to God for his own sake and yet to do so in the hope of resurrection because we trust that our present experience of God is not mistaken and that whatever happens to us in death will not make nonsense of that. That precisely this combination is possible is shown in Lampe's profoundly Christian sermon on death (1981b) which we discussed at a much earlier stage.

4 That we cannot know what lies beyond our experience. This may be seen as a prohibition of Christian eschatology which comes as a direct consequence of Wittgenstein's teaching that: 'Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through'. Thus Sutherland (1967:388) speaks of death as 'unlike that which is known, and whose opaqueness denies any validity to speculation'. Lash too is concerned to preserve a considerable amount of agnosticism about life after death. He notes

that attempts to provide 'imaginatively satisfying accounts' of resurrection 'have usually not been free from an element of "mythological fantasy"'. He even goes as far as to say: 'Once deprive Christian reflection on the mystery of man's participation in God's eternity of its dark centre in Gethsemane and Golgotha, and . . . you move, not into paradise, but fairyland' (1979c:181, 182. Cf Rahner, 1975a:169). Once again there is much truth here and we could doubtless find evidence for Lash's fears from some Christian writing on eschatology. It is true that we cannot know what lies beyond death; we cannot look into it and report back on what we see. Thus Christian eschatology cannot be a report about what lies beyond death. However, the reason why faith attempts to say something about life after death is because it believes that, even though we cannot look into it, it must be consistent with, and a fulfilment of, our present experience of God. Christian faith refuses to erect an absolute barrier between this life and the next, and in this sense it is very much in conflict with Wittgenstein. Christian eschatology is thus a sketch of the general direction in which we believe God to be moving us. It is not looking ahead into things which cannot be seen yet, but rather a cautious extrapolation from the present, ie from what faith teaches of God's present activity. We shall return to this fundamentally important point shortly. In short, this objection is not to be accepted as a prohibition of Christian eschatology, but it should force us to think more carefully about why faith speaks of life after death and how it does so.

5 That finality and the eternal can be achieved without the need to think in terms of another life after this one, since some human achievements are such that no subsequent occurrences can detract from them. Sutherland argues that the attempt to give meaning to 'eternal life' by asking 'What happens after death?' is misguided. Rather we should begin from an acceptance of the limitations imposed by human mortality. Although immortality in the more traditional sense is set aside, Sutherland believes that this can be improved upon by noting that 'the significance of some decisions and actions is that it cannot be lost: it does not depend upon what comes after, upon the way things go' (1969:418, 411, 415. Cf 1981; 1984:177-94). Obviously for the Christian believer the supreme example will be that of Christ himself. Here we recall MacKinnon's use of the example of Lenin to show that such finality is possible in history and his suggestion that Lenin's

work provides us with 'a highly significant analogy with the work of Christ' (1979b:59). Again we must recognise a very valuable insight here which illuminates Christ's work and disallows unwarranted pessimism in the face of death as we saw earlier. However, we do not see any reason why this insight should be taken as a replacement for a belief in life after death. (This, if pursued, would take us back to a critical examination of why Sutherland chooses to accept the finality of death in the sense which we have already argued is inappropriate for Christian faith). It is quite possible to combine an insistence upon the finality of some actions in this life with an equally insistent belief in life after death. Indeed, we might even think it quite natural to do so if God's purpose is the creation of persons capable of such finality.

6 That the 'after' of 'life after death' is metaphorical since temporality is a function of this life only. This is a rather different sort of objection from those considered so far. It is not an objection to the attempt to speak of what happens beyond death; rather it is an insistence upon how we ought to speak of this. Rahner insists upon the non-temporal character of eschatological life very strongly:

> We do not mean that 'things go on' after death, as though we only changed horses, as Feuerbach puts it, and rode on. It is not a continuation of the peculiar distraction and vagueness of temporal existence, which is an openness always in need of new determinations and hence basically empty (1966d:347. Cf 1975a:174, 186; Lash, 1979c:169).

It is apparent from this that Rahner is concerned for an achieved finality in the eschaton. He rightly recognises that a form of eternal life which was merely the prolongation of our present incomplete experience of temporality would not be very interesting or valuable from a religious point of view. This is an important point but it may be doubted if it is really satisfactory to think of eternal life in strictly non-temporal terms. A number of points must be made here. First, we have already argued for the temporal afterwardness of Jesus' resurrection as an historical event. Second, God's eternity is increasingly understood in temporal terms by an impressive array of scholars (eg Berkhof, 1979:540; Pike, 1970:190,

' . . . it is unlikely that the doctrine of timelessness really has very much to offer in the way of systematic advantage'; Swinburne 1977b:210-22; Sykes, 1976:251; van der Walle, 1984:195-99; Ward 1982b:149-70). 'If this is so, and we must re-think the concept of God in essentially temporal terms . . . then clearly our understanding of the ultimate future of man and of creation cannot possibly take non-temporal forms' (Hebblethwaite, 1984:179). Third, the intelligibility of timeless existence is not clear. Replying to Sykes' criticism of Rahner at this point (1976:252), Lash (1979c:169) asks 'what sort of clarity should we expect in these matters?'. Although it is true that complete clarity will not be possible here, it is surely the case that we ought to choose the clearest account available. This must be the temporal one, even if, as seems necessary, we must think of a modified temporality. The reason for this choice is that temporality is what we know because it is our present experience. Moreover, we have already argued against the posing of a radical disjunction between this life and the world to come, and this further supports our choice of a temporal model for life after death. Fourth, the pressure of theodicy requires us to think in terms of time within eternity as an opportunity for human growth (Sykes, 1976:270; cf Hebblethwaite, 1984:197; Ward, 1982b:201-02). Hence our general conclusion is that while this objection is acceptable if it is directed against the simple prolongation of this life, it is not very convincing if it is meant to exclude any sort of temporality from our experience beyond death. Perhaps the phrase 'life beyond death' conveys more directly the victory of Christ's resurrection and the indestructibility of eternal life. Nevertheless, the phrase 'life after death' is to be preferred since it preseves better the continuity of the human person (Sutherland, 1969:407).

These six objections which we have discussed are important reminders of the dangers which may beset attempts to speak of the hope for life after death. However, they fail to give proper weight to the deep theological concern which prompts the authors who do try to sketch out something of this dimension of the Christian hope. It is interesting to see how many writers are deeply ambiguous about the possibility of speaking of life after death, vacillating between denying that anything can be said and the things which they actually do say (see eg Kueng, 1984:140, 272; van der Walle, 1984:142). As Aldwinckle (1972:168) puts it: 'There are times when

we may be tempted to say of heaven as Augustine said of the Trinity, that we are compelled to speak in order not to be reduced to silence'. In other words, there seems to be a recognition that 'we should try to say something about eternal life; if only because the concept may not now suddenly fall silent'. Religious imagination is not idle fantasy but a search for 'the direction in which eternity is to be found' (1979:534, 539 but cf the ambiguity of 537, 'analogy and extrapolation will also become useless', 'the questions which we now ask about eternal life . . . will then appear childish and pointless').

The direction of eternal life can be suggested without falling into fantasy because eschatological statements are grounded in our present experience of God's love. Talk of life after death is an attempt to sketch out the kind of human destiny which is consonant with our understanding of God and his relationship to us. It is therefore driven very powerfully theologically, ie by our concern for the doctrine of God (cf Pannenberg, 1970h). This brings us to the most important principle for the formulation and interpretation of eschatological statements, ie, 'We do not project something from the future into the present, but rather in man's experience of himself and of God in grace and in Christ we project our Christian present into its future'. 'It is a view of how the future has to be if the present as the beginning of the future is what man knows it to be in his Christian anthropology'. Nevertheless, our final destiny in God remains a mystery, and this means that we do not have to speak 'in the emphatic way of an initiate, of someone who knows his way around better in eternity with God than in the dark dungeon of the present' (1978:432, 433, 434, cf 1968b). Thus, in what follows, we shall attempt to sketch out a Christian eschatology in terms of three basic features of our present experience.

(b) The anthropological options

In this section we shall be concerned with the question of whether it is better to think of life after death in terms of a bodily resurrection or not. The extent to which the philosophical and theological problems surrounding this continue to generate academic discussion, as a glance through past volumes of Religious Studies quickly reveals, is powerful testimony to the ongoing liveliness and importance of the subject. We shall not rehearse the detail of the several arguments but shall seek to pinpoint the main issues and their significance for Christian thinking about life after death.

Swinburne argues that 'personal identity is something ultimate' and

empirically unanalysable. What a person is is logically prior to the evidence/criteria of personal identity. Thus 'while evidence of continuity of body, memory, and character is evidence of personal identity, personal identity is not constituted by continuity of body, memory and character' (1977b:119-20, cf 1977a; Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984:65-66; Hamlyn, 1984: 190, 203). Nevertheless, it is difficult not to sympathise with Shoemaker's reply in which he complains about 'the sharp divorce Swinburne apparently wants to effect between epistemology and metaphysics - in this case, between the question of how personal identity is known, and the question of what it consists in'. Indeed, Swinburne's account leaves it 'an unexplained mystery that the things we count as evidence of personal identity really are good evidence of it' (1984:150-51). Hamlyn (1984:202) seems to agree with this when he writes that 'any view of persons which implies that the factors which we normally take to follow from their being selves (eg those about the possibility of personal and other relations) have no relevance to what a person is must be wrong'. Hamlyn is thinking in particular of embodied and self-conscious existence. Although there are unresolved puzzles, and the following may not be an exhaustive account of personal identity, it does seem reasonable to suggest that ordinarily personal identity consists minimally in continuity, at least to some extent; and it may be a complex continuity (see later) of memory, self-consciousness, character and body, a unique space-time path. The core of the person seems to be very much concerned with the mental life of the subject (see eg Hamlyn, 1984:188; Helm, 1978; Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984:65). The question then becomes that of the relation between this core and bodily organic existence.

The philosophical debate is essentially between materialism and some form of dualism. Most theologians would reject materialism while insisting upon the importance of the body since human being is a psychosomatic unity (see eg Davies, 1982:119-32; Kueng, 1984:140-44; Wainwright, 1980:450-52; Ward, 1985:132-50. Cf Eccles, 1984:234 who favours 'a strong dualist interactionism' as the solution of the mind-brain problem). This means that while the language of 'soul' needs to be interpreted carefully (see eg Rahner, 1981d:80-82), it does preserve the very important anti-materialist point that persons are not adequately grasped by descriptions which confine themselves to the level of organic bio-chemical processes. This sort of description does not get to the fundamentally personal definition of human beings. The language of 'soul' should have the primary function of alerting us to the 'transcendence' of person over the material level. Nevertheless, while a rejection of materialism <u>may</u> allow persons to survive

bodily disintegration, it is not clear that this follows necessarily. Thus, as Ward (1985:149) points out, at the present the soul seems to depend on the brain. Although 'the soul need not always depend on the brain, any more than a man need always depend on the womb which supported his life before birth', it is difficult to know if this does actually change at death or not. The significance of this for the possibilities of human life after death is that while persons are more than bodies, it does not follow that persons can exist without bodies.

The advantage of the possibility of persons without bodies is that it makes life after death possible even though our current bodies are clearly destroyed by death. This will be considered particularly welcome if we find the notion of any kind of bodily-based existence which would not be subject to death either inconceivable or implausible. In principle it is difficult to see why the notion of some future bodily existence should be so much of an obstacle for contemporary faith since resurrection is thought of in the New Testament as a new creation and a transformed body (eg in 1 Corinthians 15).

The 'soul' (ie disembodied mental existence) version of eschatology is possible. This becomes so as soon as we reject the simple materialist identity thesis (Davies, 1982:121). It can also be argued that since we believe that God is in some sense a 'personal agent' without a body, it ought to be possible to think of human persons without bodies (see eg Gooch, 1981:212-13; Swinburne, 1977b:97-125; Wiles, 1974:140; Ward, 1982a:130). The force of this argument may be weakened considerably if we think that one of the crucial differences between God and human persons is their finitude constituted not exclusively, but definitively, by a locally limited presence, ie a bodily space-time path. Ward (1982a:124, 130) suggests further that our experience of dreams and of telekinesis points to the possibility of a disembodied mental after-life. Price (1967:459) even thinks that 'some mediumistic communications do provide us with evidence for the continued existence of human personality after death' (but see Rahner's strong objection to this approach in 1966d:353). Whatever we may think of this particular point, and here we tend to follow Rahner, Badham (1976:146) concludes that 'Price's theory of a purely mental existence is logically possible and internally coherent' and satisfies the most important conditions of the Christian hope. Travis (1980:99, 108), while not entirely convinced that either treatment does justice to a Christian eschatology, nevertheless admits that the intelligibility and coherence of Price's work 'is widely judged to have been successful' and that Badham's adaptation of it is a serious attempt to express it 'in terms consistent

with Christian tradition'. Together these various points of view add up to a strong case for the possibility of a disembodied version of individual eschatology.

However, while this may be so, it seems to us that the resurrection of the body is still the most adequate expression of the Christian hope. Here it may be relevant that the philosophical discussions tend to have the function of establishing a minimally possible account of human life after death. This is very important since we should not put unnecessary obstacles in the way of faith. Nevertheless, it must be said that Christian faith is not so much concerned with the minimally possible account as with the development of a vision of future human possibilities from the basis of its own particular understanding of life. MacKinnon (1963:265-66) expresses a certain dissatisfaction with philosophy of religion at this point when he says that '(t)o develop this theme [ie of Christian eschatology] belongs not to philosophy but to theology, and above all to Christology'. In what follows we shall commend the superiority of an embodied Christian individual eschatology by bringing together some philosophical and specifically Christian theological considerations.

Perhaps in the first place we should point out that the bodily version of individual eschatology is more intelligible. Rahner and Weger (1980b: 110) contend that 'it is a mistake to think that the actual definitive form of a human being is really easier to imagine in terms of his or her 'soul' than if, while accepting all the legitimate distinctions of different elements, one regards a human being as single entity'. The various non-bodily versions tend to illustrate their possibility by use of rather peripheral and extraordinary, rather than mainstream, features of human experience. Davies (1982:131) comments that even if we accept the possibility of a disembodied life 'the life it holds out for us is surely bleak indeed'. A hope based on the projection of certain mental experiences is not, in his view, particularly worth looking forward to. Although someone like Price would claim that the mainstream features of existence which we shall now mention can be preserved in a purely mental existence, and this claim cannot be rejected, it is much easier to see how they could be fulfilled, and more satisfactorily, in some form of bodily existence after death.

Thus it is often pointed out that relations with things and persons and other forms of life are much more plausible if we think of persons with bodies (see eg Kueng, 1984:143; Macquarrie, 1978b:362). It is true that the resurrection of the body does not provide for any simple continuity between this life and life after death in the way often mistakenly

suggested because we must think in terms of a new creation which does not involve the transformation of the constituents of our body in this life (see Wiles, 1974:140-41). Jesus' resurrection may well be different from our own and Travis (1980:114) points out that it is impossible to eliminate an element of discontinuity between the two. Nevertheless bodily continuity of a more complex sort may give 'a stronger concept of identity than that which could be expected in a world of disembodied persons' (Sutherland, 1967:386). This more complex continuity may be thought of as the appropriate new embodiment of the person as God's new creative act. (Interestingly, Hebblethwaite [1984:211], noting that no simple continuity can exist, argues that personal continuity can only be retained if we think of some place for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul within the broader framework of the resurrection of the body. Cf Badham, 1976:85-94; Lash, 1979c:165; Wiles, 1974:127. If 'soul' is necessary in this way this is bound to have repercussions for our understanding of Holy Saturday. It would suggest a return to von Balthasar's approach rather than our own development of the theme of interruption.) A final example of the advantage of an embodied version is that if we think in this way it is much easier to see how recognition, fundamental to human relationships, is possible. This need not involve the exact replica theory proposed by Hick (1976:279-85).

It is difficult to disagree with Hamlyn's summary:

> It follows, nevertheless, that spatio-temporal continuity is not a necessary condition of personal identity, although it is the norm against which deviations also can be seen to be intelligible, whether or not such deviations occur. Similar considerations apply to the possibility of disembodied personal existence (1984:211).

That is why 'it seems right to suppose that we will possess bodily existence in a space-time with slightly, but not completely, different properties from those of our present space-time'. Therefore, although Ward believes that he has shown by a highly speculative thought experiment the conceivability and desirability of non-bodily existence, he concedes that since such an existence as he has described would require telepathic and other skills far in excess of the present, '(a)n after-world more commensurate with our rather more mundane and undeveloped spirits would be the resurrection-world postulated by Christian faith' (1982a:127-28, 133).

In other words, although a disembodied eschatology is theoretically

possible, it can be seen to be in too great a discontinuity with our current experience to be the most appropriate destiny for us. An embodied version lies closer to our present lives and is therefore more conceivable and appropriate as the consummation of our personal existence. Here we must recall what we have said about the fundamental principle of projection from the present which must be used for the construction and interpretation of eschatological statements. So broadly speaking it is the continuity with the present and the coherence with other items of Christian belief which points to the superiority of the resurrection of the body as the symbol of Christian hope. The latter point could be emphasised by relating this version of eschatology to both the resurrection of Jesus (which we have suggested should be thought of as a bodily resurrection) and the Christian belief in the goodness of creation and matter (see Tillich, 1978c:412, and sub-section (d)). We might also add that the doctrine of the resurrection of the body preserves the finitude of the human, since this tends to be hidden or even denied in some 'soul' versions.

In conclusion, then, although both versions of individual eschatology are possible, there are good grounds, in terms of both philosophical and specifically Christian theological considerations, for preferring the resurrection of the body. Thus Pannenberg (1968a:187) describes the 'resurrection of the dead' which expresses the Christian hope as an 'absolute metaphor' in the sense that it is 'the sole appropriate expression for a definite subject matter, and is neither interchangeable with other images nor reducible to a separate, rational kernel'.

Christian eschatology refuses to treat the individual in isolation. The individual is always to be thought of as a member of a community. It is to the social nature of the Christian hope for life after death that we must now turn.

(c) The vision of true community

It is highly significant that the resurrection of the dead is a social metaphor which nevertheless also preserves the uniqueness of each individual (cf Tillich, 1978c:413). It expresses the Christian conviction that true individuality flourishes in true community. Love is both the means and the end of the Christian journey towards God. Love can only be practised in social relationships and this rules out as a self-contradictory notion the possibiity of a purely private individual salvation. Christian experience of salvation is thus one of a sharing in community, and this is why we stressed the importance of the church for

salvation and hope in chapter one. Therefore, when Christian hope looks forward to the completion of salvation beyond death it does so in terms of a vision of the fulfilment of the social experience of salvation which we already enjoy now. Eschatology must not undo the social fabric of creation but must rather improve upon it in certain ways so that the limitations of our experience of community which frustrate the work of love can be overcome.

The fundamental importance of human community for God's purposes of creating personal life lived in love shows that the latent individualism of much Christian teaching about the beatific vision must be avoided (see eg the criticisms by Kueng, 1984:269. Cf Berkhof, 1979:535). Love for God is not reducible to our love for others but neither is it separable from this. Indeed, this is so because the love shared in the visible community is a training and expression of the love we give to the invisible God (cf 1 John 4.12, 20) and his love for us takes concrete shape in Jesus and in others. Only in this way can we experience and respond to the love of God. Thus the beatific vision certainly cannot mean the loss of the social mediation of God's love and our response. There is a mystery concerning what 'seeing God' really means. Tinsley (1983a:601) suggests that this is 'an inadequate metaphor for the profoundly personal reciprocal character of the human communion with God in its perfection'. Perhaps then we should think of the beatific vision as that state of perfection in which the fulfilment of love in the community of heaven enables us to give ourselves totally to the divine love as the hidden ground of our being. In any case the social nature of life after death is fundamental; without it the life of heaven could not be the perfection of love. Thinking from our present experience of community we may sketch out a possible social fulfilment of Christian hope.

In the social situation of life after death we may hope for the fulfilment of our true potential for love and personhood. This growth in love and personhood will be facilitated by the new social situation into which resurrection places us. Just as social relationships are the way in which God intends the human to flourish in this life, so we may imagine this continuing but at a much higher level. It is clear that most of us are still some way off the full development of our capacity for personhood at the end of our lives. Thus we argued that the incompleteness of our lives points strongly to the reality of life after death if we believe that God is concerned with the creation of the personal. However, we cannot imagine that the transition from the incompleteness of this life to the completeness of the final consummation can take place immediately upon

resurrection to life after death. The emergence of the personal requires time. We shall argue this more fully in the next chapter. The point to note here is that we must think of a growth towards perfection made possible through the new opportunities of the social situation of life after death, rather than an immediate transition to a perfectly realised communal life.

We are well aware of how powerfully our lives are conditioned by social and environmental factors. It is not surprising that a child born into a happy family where it is loved and well provided for will be more likely to develop into a caring and responsible adult than a child born into a home where relationships have soured and love is barely present. In many ways we can think of how our personal possibilities are constrained by factors about which we can do little or nothing. If this is true of those who have the freedom from their circumstances to be able to think and write, it is true a fortiori of the many less privileged of advanced societies and especially of the millions for whom life is literally a desperate struggle for survival which is often lost. When we consider how terribly life treats so many, cutting short or depriving life of the opportunities it needs to flourish, sometimes severely dehumanising its victims, it is difficult to believe that God's purposes of love can be realised for these people. Yet we can imagine how things could have been different, and we do know that the victims of life can be helped to recover and grow. These are small clues from our present experience which suggest the possibility of personal fulfilment even for history's worst victims if they can be placed in creative and constructive loving relationships. Macquarrie (1978a:120), with Christ's death and resurrection as the supreme example, offers us the hope that 'God is not changing the past by changing the facts that have happened (this is not possible even for him) but by bringing it into . . . "an ever wider reconciling context"'. Our suggestion is that this takes shape in life after death by means of the creative and redemptive potential of loving human relationships. This is continuous with our current experience of the love of God which comes to us through the fabric of human life. If soteriology and ecclesiology must be held together in this life, soteriology and the community of heaven must be held together in life after death.

The realisation of the person's true potential must respect the integrity of the individual in that it cannot involve a change so great that we can no longer be talking about the same person. To take some examples: we would not find it difficult to imagine someone who was born with one leg shorter than the other or crippled in some way being

resurrected with two perfect legs. Rather differently, we can imagine someone who had been treated cruelly by others becoming a more trusting, loving person given enough time and care. Neither of these transformations seem to be particularly difficult. Lots of other changes are also imaginable and we would think highly appropriate as the saving work of God's love. These represent the flourishing of the person - it is for precisely this kind of change that we hope so that the individual can emerge fully for the first time with the removal of those features which frustrated their potential. However, other sorts of changes may be impossible and unacceptable because they represent not so much the flourishing of the self but the substitution of someone else whom we cannot claim is the same person only fulfilled. Certain limitation are part of the essential self-definition of the person. It would be wrong to hope for their removal since this is tantamount to the rejecting of the person. In such cases we must learn to love the person as he or she is, and see their fulfilment in eternal life as much more a case of a change in our perceptions and ways of relating to such limitations.

It is not easy to know which limitations are part of the essential self-definition of the person. However, a strong case can be made for looking upon mental handicap in this way. Frances Young writes very powerfully about what she has learned through her severely handicapped son, Arthur. She is convinced that to think of his condition 'in terms of the soul peeping out through the eyes which will . . . suddenly come to some sort of flowering in the life to come, is entirely implausible . . . There is no "ideal Arthur" somehow trapped in this damaged physical casing. He is a psychosomatic whole'. Moreover, she tells us, 'I find it impossible to envisage what it would mean for him to be "healed", because what personality there is is so much part of him as he is, with all his limitations. "Healed" he would be a different person'. Arthur will have his own way of sharing in the fellowship of heaven, as Frances Young's poem, which we have abbreviated, suggests:

A party invitation! The heavenly feast!
Who'll be there?
Everyone's invited, even the least . . .
Just bring your musical instrument to play.
Arthur can't share.
Everyone will participate in some way.
Stuck in his chair?
Somehow he'll be fitted to play his role.

Will people stare?
No, no. He'll take his part in the joyful whole.
He'll be aware?
Everyone will respond and give of their best.
Each has some flair.
The conductor, you see, will be a special guest.
Under his care
The entire ensemble will play together as one.

This vision of how the mentally handicapped like Arthur might be able to share in, and make their own distinctive and valued contribution to, the life of heaven is not merely fanciful since it is anticipated already in the fellowship of the church and the acceptance, joy and love which Arthur has been given and occasioned there. It has the enormously desirable advantage of valuing Arthur as he is and does not require us to think of an impossible transformation in his ability to relate to the world (although we should think of the elimination of any distress which may be caused by mental handicap). The impossibility of thinking of Arthur without the limitations of his handicap, together with an equal insistence that as Arthur he will contribute to the rich life of heaven, shows that we must be careful not to project our assumptions about the nature of perfection onto our picturing of heaven. Indeed, as Frances Young points out, the presence of handicap acts as a kind of judgement upon our assumptions about perfection and achievement (1985:47, 48, 86-87, 108).

The Christian hope for heaven does not look forward to a society of Olympian perfection. Love is the index of Christian perfection. Where this is shared among people and characterises their relationships it is not necessary to think in terms of the elimination of all physical and intellectual limitations. In any case, the person who is intellectually relatively limited cannot suddenly become a genius if we wish to maintain that he or she is the same person. We may think of the elimination of some physical and mental (both intellectual and psychological) limitations as being appropriate to the growth of love. The case of the mentally handicapped alerts us to the fact that love can be fulfilled where the physical and intellectual capacities which most people enjoy are severely diminished. This suggests that the fulfilment of true community may be rather more complex than we might think at first, being found more in the way love changes our perceptions of such handicaps, and our relationships with the handicapped, than the removal of the handicap itself. Such a principle may well have a wider application in the social community of

heaven, and certainly must be applied in cases where a more radical transformation of the individual apparently would involve the substitution of the person and could not be considered as eternal life for the specific individual concerned.

Our identity as persons is found in what we may call a structured set of relationships. We are who we are in relation to a large number of people in a variety of ways. We may think of the most important relationships being those within our families, but also very important are the relationships with close and not so close friends, occasional acquaintances, people with whom we work in our leisure time towards the promotion of a common concern, our neighbours and those who live locally, and those with whom we work. In the social life of heaven we may hope for a greater openness and diversity within our relationships. Thus we may hope that the closest relationships will not isolate us from others but will enable us to share our lives more fully with others as well. In the best of relationships here and now we can see a foretaste of what this might mean. Some authors seem to envisage the loss of <u>all</u> finitude about human relationships such that full relationships will be possible with everyone in heaven (see eg Braaten, 1983:296, ' . . . there is a drive toward infinite freedom within human beings which seeks a total unburdening from every limitation'). However, we may doubt whether it is coherent to look forward to a total and infinite range of openness if we still wish to maintain that these are human relationships. Human being is finite and it cannot escape from every aspect of the finitude of this life even in heaven. Moreover, the identity and uniqueness of each individual is found in the way in which each individual has a uniquely different set of relationships. Thus Craighead (1979:665) complains that Hick's eschatology 'ends with individuality and personal identity swallowed up in a unitive state of total harmony and sharing'. The absence of a structured set of relationships in heaven puts at risk both the human and uniquely personal character of life after death. The hope is not for the disappearance of such structure but rather for a wider and more open structure. In this case it is entirely appropriate that those closest and most meaningful of human relationships in this life should occupy an equally central place in the definition of the person in life after death (cf Hebblethwaite, 1984:225; Simon, 1964: 209). Indeed, it is very difficult to see how we could be the same persons in the absence of this.

The notion of what is appropriate is a very important one for thinking about life after death, and is an attempt to maintain the continuity and individuality of the person without which talk of fulfilment beyond

death becomes empty. It must also leave room for a certain amount of discontinuity between this life and life after death. In the first place relationships are always changing and growing. In the second, in some cases it is vital for the fulfilment of the person that their experience of relationships in life after death be very different from their unhappy and destructive experiences in this life. It would be quite inappropriate to think of persons being trapped in the bad, mistaken or unworkable relationships of this life. If we must stress the abiding centrality of our most intimate relationships within the structured set of relationships in life after death where these have been happy and fulfilling in this life, equally we must stress the freedom of the person afflicted by such relationships in this life to find a new structure and centre for his or her life. Such considerations show the inadequacy of any approach to the relationship between this life and life after death which does not allow for the availability of new transformative possibilities for the person. Without these it is very difficult to see why many people should hope for life after death.

Life after death is a movement into communion with God and an ever increasing realisation of his love in our relationships with each other. In this way the community of heaven will exhibit a trinitarian character and be a reflection of the mystery of the life of God himself since the doctrine of the Trinity insists that 'it is communion which makes being "be": nothing exists without it, not even God' (Zizioulas, 1985:17). In life after death we may expect the relational nature of the person to be heightened as we learn to live by giving ourselves to others. This corresponds to the priority of being over having in the divine life (Kaelin, 1976:493), and here the work of Fromm (1957, 1979; cf Louth, 1979:391) may well be instructive for both contemporary social practice and our imaginative reflection upon the social possibilities of life after death. Heather Ward (1982:181) points out that a Christian notion of the self is to be distinguished sharply from the self-centredness of our acquisitive and possessive culture: 'Self-dispossessing, self-emptying is inseparable from the being of God and therefore from those he has made to become sons in the Son'. Our contemporary experience of the life of the church and our expectation of the social character of life after death both witness to the Christian conviction that true life is found in giving oneself to others rather than a selfish preoccupation with oneself. We must learn to live outside of ourselves in an ekstasis which reaches out to others and ultimately to God himself. It is the tragic irony of human existence that when we try to live for ourselves we lose our humanity, yet

when we are prepared to lose everything in the service of others, we find true human fulfilment (cf Matthew, 10.39). This means that the self-giving which will characterise life after death is not at all the loss of the self, just as the self-giving which characterises the inner life of God is not the obliteration of the threefold distinctiveness of Father, Son and Spirit but their very quintessence. Once again, eschatological and trinitarian thinking can be brought together fruitfully since the social community of heaven is the perfected human image of the triune life of God. Such communal existence after death is characterised by an attitude of 'complete selflessness, not in the loss of the I, but in its being penetrated by the radiance of the attitude of the divine triune process (von Balthasar, 1983:421, cf Aldwinckle, 1972:171).

The social fulfilment of the Christian hope should be thought of in ongoing and dynamic terms since change, growth and a continuing creativity characterise all relationships of love. Love is a never ending journey and a continuous exploration. Therefore the end is not a static perfection but a continuous consummation, an ever increasing perfection. 'It is the final ecstasy of life, a vital movement beyond every stasis' (Braaten, 1983:297. Cf Macquarrie, 1978a:107; Moltmann, 1979i). The thought of an ever increasing perfection, at first difficult, can be seen to be possible when we consider that the life of the Trinity is one of a continual movement and overflowing abundance (cf Juengel, 1976b:32-33; Tillich, 1978c:419-23; Tracy, 1981:443). The fact that the eschaton has this dynamic quality means that the important statements about persons reaching an achieved finality must be interpreted carefully. Finality is achieved in the eschaton in the sense that persons reach the fulfilment God intends for them. This means that we must think in terms of moving beyond our present experience of temporality and the fragmentary incompleteness of life. On the other hand, the finality achieved is an open finality directed towards its own increase in the inexhaustible creativity of love. This means that eternity requires a temporal dimension of some sort.

The thought of an ever increasing perfection perhaps casts some light upon the poverty of our attempts to speak about the Christian hope for life after death. We have already seen that some reasons why such talk is supposedly impossible (eg that life after death is quite unknown because totally different from this life) must be rejected from a Christian point of view. However, we can now see that there is a reason why all our attempts are inadequate which arises from the very substance of the hope, namely, that the community of heaven is so full of life and movement. If we stress this as the reason our ignorance and poverty of imagination can

be seen in their essentially positive significance. They would then point to the fact that eternal life is life with God, in whose presence there is fullness of life. C S Lewis understood very well the 'how much more' of Christian eschatology. Thus his imagery constantly conveys to us the contrast between the sheer majesty of heaven and the shadowy, flimsy nature of life on earth by comparison. Van der Walle (1984:191) makes an important point when he says that talk about eternal life has concentrated too exclusively upon the word 'eternal' - what needs to be stressed above all is that the dead find life.

(d) The hope for creation

So far we have concentrated upon the Christian hope for human beings in life after death. While it is proper to think of this as the focus of the hope since incarnation and resurrection suggest that God is uniquely concerned with the emergence of the human, nevertheless it is important that the cosmic vision of the biblical hope is not overlooked (see eg Romans 8.22; Revelation 21.1). We can think of at least four reasons why this is so. First, human beings cannot be abstracted from the rest of creation since we require a world in which to live. Caird (1970b:22) writes that '(t)he whole point of the resurrection of the body is that the life of the world to come is to be lived on a renewed earth'. An eschatology which concentrates upon the individual to the neglect of a cosmic hope forgets that man is 'the child of this earth' (Rahner, 1963:215, cf Tillich, 1978a:168-71). Second, human beings have a particular evolutionary solidarity with other animal life (see Midgley, 1983:140). Third, Christian theology must be aware of the ecological import of its statements. In particular, a view of the world as merely instrumental to the emergence of the human may well lead (and many would argue has done so) to the destructive exploitation of the earth. This shows the importance of articulating a properly Christian doctrine of creation so that texts such as Genesis 1.28 ('Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth') cannot be used to legitimate such abuse. The instrumental view of creation is a very serious misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine of creation which should stress that God loves all creation. It this is true, it leads to our fourth point, namely, any assumption that God is only concerned with the emergence and preservation of the human and personal verges upon a blasphemous anthropocentricity. It is quite mistaken to think that because

God is primarily concerned with the human, this is his sole concern with creation or that everything else in creation has the purpose of serving this cause (cf Wiles, 1974:136; Simon, 1964:207). For these reasons we must think about the possible future of the material universe and other non-human forms of life, even though we must admit that here we must proceed with even greater reserve than in the earlier discussion of eschatology (Berkhof, 1979:528, 536).

The so-called higher forms of animal life are closest to human life and so we may begin here. The relationship is sufficiently close for Ward (1982b:202) to argue that '(i)mmortality, for animals as well as humans, is a necessary condition of any acceptable theodicy'. Eastern Christianity is particularly aware of the solidarity between humans and the other creatures. Thus Lossky tells us: 'In his way to union with God, man in no way leaves creatures aside, but gathers together in his love the whole cosmos disordered by sin, that it may at last be transfigured by grace' (1975:111, cf Allchin, 1978:84). By contrast Hebblethwaite thinks that animal life will participate in eternity only in our memories: ' . . . the idea of a rose, or memories of material objects may be translated into eternity, but not the rose, the animal, the mountain, the cathedral, themselves'. Persons, ideas and memories may all participate in eternity but not the perishable material and corporeal. 'Animal life is surely an inherently temporary value . . . too much rooted in perishable corporeal substance to be thought of as potentially resurrectable in a non-material, imperishable form' (1984:208, 209).

It is not at all obvious that human existence is any better placed in this respect. Therefore, in reply we would suggest that since we are rooted in our perishable physical existence and yet trust in resurrection, the perishable nature of animal life is not a reason to suppose that animals cannot participate in a resurrection world. Moreover, we may think that if the memory of animal life is worth preserving then the reality is all the more so, and this is something which is perfectly possible in principle through the new creative act of resurrection. Hebblethwaite makes it clear that a crucial distinction between humans and animals is the emergence of spirit in human life. This is why he argues that human life is less deeply and inseparably rooted in physical existence. The distinction may be an important one but our earlier discussion warned against thinking too readily that because persons are more than bodies they can exist without bodies or can survive the dissolution of their physical existence. The presence of spirit or the capacity to enter into personal relations is the criterion for participation in God's eternity. 'All the

arguments from God's love to immortality come into force at the point where that love can be reciprocated and not before (1984:209).

If we believe that God's primary purpose in creation is to bring forth the personal then it is logical to believe that we are on firmest ground when we suggest that personal life will share in God's eternity. This is the most valuable insight in Hebblethwaite's approach but we may suggest that it is drawn too narrowly. It is true that the capacity for personal relationships is most highly developed in human beings. However, given our evolutionary solidarity with the animals, it would be surprising if we did not find something like this capacity in a less developed fashion in the higher animals. It is surely the case that we do find something like the personal here in the capacity of animals to relate to each other and to human beings. The often-made charge of anthropomorphism must be rejected if it is supposed to mean that 'we can know nothing of conscious states outside our own species'. On the contrary, the justification for thinking that we do know something about this is 'of the same kind as the justification of our beliefs about the inner states of other people - namely, its general success'. Midgley points out that 'those who try to understand animals, and give time and attention to the matter, often come to understand them quite well. Those who do not, fail, which is also true with human beings' (1983:142, 133). Thus Hebblethwaite's criterion may be expanded to recognise a continuity - rather than a fundamental break - between the capacity of at least the higher animals and human beings for the personal. This would then allow the higher animals to qualify for participation in God's eternity on his own terms.

The second expansion of his approach which seems necessary is to point out that the main criterion is not the <u>only</u> criterion. Our sense of the importance of the personal leads us to identify its emergence as the primary purpose of creation. However, we have no grounds for supposing this to be the only purpose of creation and hence the only criterion of participation in eternity. We simply do not know what other purposes God may have, and it is certainly an extreme form of anthropocentricity which thinks that the creation of the human and personal is the only worthwhile and lasting achievement of creation. As Farmer (1935:303) expressed it:

> . . . it is very difficult to believe, though there is nothing logically impossible in the idea, that the whole order of animate and inanimate nature, in its infinite richness and complexity and beauty, has no other significance than to provide a temporary setting for the training of human

> personality, and does not rather express some necessity of the divine nature which, while never running counter to the latter, and always serving it, none the less goes far beyond it.

Creation may reflect the glory of God in ways we are quite unaware of, and God may delight in features of the world which we remain ignorant of or find of no value. Everything has its place - even talk of the 'higher' animals must be treated carefully since each creature is as well adapted for its own purposes as we are for our own. The use of the term 'higher' is an example of how easily we slip into inappropriate anthropocentric ways of viewing the world. The ecology is inter-dependent and not hierarchical (Ruether, 1981:67). We shall return to the importance of this for our relation with the natural environment in this world.

It is difficult to believe that the beauty of the physical universe will not figure in some transfigured way in the final consummation. If this were not so there would be rupture between the doctrines of creation and eschatology such that eschatology was no longer the consummation of creation but rather a fundamentally new departure. When we consider that the Christian hope embraces the whole of creation we come to the thought of the transformation of matter. The Eastern church believes in this very strongly because of the non-dualist stress of incarnation and resurrection. Icons point back to the incarnation and forward to Christ's parousia, being in themselves an anticipation of the transformation of matter. The sacraments have a similar backward and forward reference and are thought of as material vehicles for the Spirit (see Ware, 1980:41-43, 214-15, 281). For such an understanding matter and spirit belong inseparably together and the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the promise of the final renewal of the whole physical creation (cf Torrance, 1976:155; Berkhof, 1979:312).

It is certainly the case that in the history of the universe matter has shown itself to be 'the womb of spirit' (Ward, 1982a:134). It is a quite remarkable fact that through evolution matter has become conscious of and transcended itself in giving birth to spirit (Hebblethwaite, 1984:175, 203). Therefore, from a Christian point of view, which will find great significance in this development, the trouble with materialism is 'that it takes much too low a view of matter' (Ward, 1985:144. Cf Rahner, 1971g: 183, 'We Christians are, therefore, the most sublime of materialists'). It is interesting that modern physics is becoming increasingly aware of the mystery of matter and its almost mystical dimension (see eg Davies, 1984: 229, 'the meaning behind this universe'). In an interview in the Guardian,

John Polkinghorne, a former Professor of theoretical physics at Cambridge now turned Anglican priest, disagreed strongly with the Bishop of Durham's view that the grave of Jesus need not have been empty: 'You see, it's because I'm a scientist that I take matter seriously - even though mattter is turning out more elusive than we thought. . . . The Bishop of Durham is a bit too spiritually minded' (Schwarz, 1986) It would be a strange irony if theologians were found to be sitting rather lightly by the importance of matter at the very time when the scientists are telling us to take matter more seriously.

Nevertheless the transformation of matter is a difficult thought on at least three grounds. First, on grounds of intelligibility, since it is far from clear what matter is and thus what its transformation might mean (but see shortly). Second, on grounds of necessity since if we think in terms of those who have died having been resurrected instantaneously this points to the existence of another resurrection world which does not depend upon the transformation of this world for its existence. Therefore, the reason for the transformation of this world, and indeed of the whole creation, cannot be found in the necessity to provide the raw material for the new creation. Third, on grounds of plausibility since the resurrection of Jesus would seem to be of a different order from the transformation of the whole of creation. It could be replied to this last point that scale is not really the problem. If the resurrection of Jesus does involve the transformation of this matter the principle of the hope for a cosmic transformation has been established. This would seem to be Torrance's understanding when he writes:

> . . . everything that the Christian Gospel tells us about the hope for personal, immortal life is bound up with the final Advent of Jesus Christ which must be given its full space time reality as an event of basically the same nature as the resurreciton of Jesus Christ from the grave. But what took place intensively there in Jerusalem will unfold in all its extensive reality, embracing the whole universe in a new heaven and a new earth (1981:161).

Hebblethwaite (1984:177, 212) argues that modern science makes the transformation of matter very implausible since 'all organised matter is inherently perishable, and it is not clear what could possibly be meant by saying that <u>matter</u> will be raised and transformed into something incorruptible in heaven'. However, we find ourselves more in agreement

with Macquarrie's assessment of the significance of our contemporary understanding of matter when he says that our awareness of the matter-energy continuum - and, we may add, the fact that energy is never lost but conserved - makes it easier than in the past to think of the resurrection of the body as the transformation of this matter-energy configuration into a new imperishable matter-energy configuration (1978a:116, cf Aldwinckle, 1972:66). Since we prefer to think in terms of a bodily resurrection immediately upon death, it is clear that we do not locate the transformation of matter in terms of the resurrection of the body. However, Macquarrie's point does suggest the possibility of a material transformation as the end of the universe. Perhaps if we can think of God having created everything in the beginning, then the thought of his re-creating everything in the end is not so difficult (although just as the ultimate origins of everything remain hidden so we cannot conceive of the final transformative act even if, on the grounds of present experience, we can have some idea of the direction in which the transformation moves).

The end of the universe is unthinkable and all scientific scenarios foresee the end of the universe as we now know it, although at a very great remove (see eg Davies, 1984:205, cf Kueng, 1984:255-58). The relationship between this future and eschatology is not clear. Tillich (1978c:399) argued that '(t)he transition from the temporal to the eternal, the 'end' of the temporal, is not a temporal event - just as the creation is not a temporal event'. While it is true that the transformation, like creation itself, cannot be an event like all the events which take place between creation and consummation, it must nevertheless be the case that the transformation impinges upon time at a certain point if it really is the end of this history. It is not clear whether Tillich means to make future history essentially irrelevant for a Christian eschatology. Our point is that even if the future point at which the end comes about cannot be known, it is important in principle to affirm that the coming of the end will correspond to some final historical state of affairs before which the end has not yet come and after which there is no more world history but rather the participation of all things in God's eternity. Transcendence and immanence must be held together since all Christian eschatologies should be able to agree that the end is God's act (cf Simon, 1964:199) in that the immanent end of the universe, for example under the pressure of entropy, or of the earth, for example through nuclear destruction, cannot in itself be the consummation which Christian hope expects. The end which only God himself can bring about could happen at either the natural or premature end of the universe, or we may think of God interrupting the historical course

and bringing everything to an end with an historical parousia of Christ (as Torrance seems to prefer). Interestingly, Macquarrie (1978b:356) thinks that 'if it were shown that the universe is indeed headed for an all-enveloping death, then this might seem to constitute a state of affairs so wasteful and negative that it might be held to falsify Christian faith and abolish Christian hope'. It may be doubted whether this would abolish hope since hope would only be empty if all things came to nothing. However, it is quite possible that God's purposes could flourish in a resurrection world which was a totally new creation and which therefore allowed for the possibility of this creation simply disappearing into nothingness. In other words, the presence now of heaven as a resurrection world (cf Rahner 1963:214-15), in which the dead already participate, is sufficient to make sure that even the total annihilation of the universe need not be a falsification of Christian hope (cf Hebblethwaite, 1984: 212-13).

Perhaps significantly many theologians are reluctant to exercise a relative indifference towards the historical future of the creation, rejecting the possibility of it reaching a final annihilation (Macquarrie), or of it being merely instrumental and dispensable (Whitehouse, 1970), or of there being an eternal dualism with two parallel worlds (Rahner, 1978: 444-46). The rejection of an eternal dualism runs deep in Christian theology (and we shall see this with respect to the doctrine of hell in the next chapter) and reflects an insistence that <u>all</u> things must be brought to fulfilment. If the universe simply continued as a parallel world to the resurrection world of heaven this would be unsatisfactory since its presence would represent an eternally unfulfilled aspect of God's creation. The annihilation of the universe need not be so difficult a prospect as this but it still sits rather unhappily with Christian belief in the goodness of creation. The fact that creation is essentially good and has value in itself beyond the instrumental function of facilitating the emergence of the human tends strongly in the direction of thinking of its final transformation rather than its annihilation. Thus a combination of the rejection of dualism and of an instrumental view of creation counts strongly in favour of a final consummation which brings together both the resurrection world of heaven and the original creation. Heaven and earth are both unfinished projects and destined to become one in the final consummation. Whether we think of this taking place before the scientifically predictable end, or at the time when all the energy of creation is concentrated in an immense black hole, is not the most important point (although we may think that the allowing of creation to sink to this level

would hardly serve any useful creative purpose). The important point is that God's creative activity will reach an all-embracing consummation.

The ecological import of different options was a significant factor in our rejection of annihilation on the grounds that this makes the creation instrumental in the final analysis. We should also point out that many authors consider the 'earthliness' of Christian eschatology important for the political practice of faith today in another sense. Thus the hope for God's righteousness on a renewed earth is a powerful stimulus to efforts aimed at the promotion of righteousness on the earth now (see eg Kaesemann, 1969e; 1978b; 1980; Moltmann, 1967:203-08). In a number of important essays (see eg 1970h; 1971f; 1971g; 1973f; 1977b) Pannenberg argues that the very being of God is at stake in what happens to creation at the end of the day: if the kingdom of God does not finally arrive in all its fullness God will not be God. It is possible that the kingdom could be realised in a way which does not involve the transformation of this creation and history. Pannenberg does not explore this with the care required. However, his insistence that eschatology must not be dehistoricised - that Christian faith cannot desert history at the last - seems to be more in keeping with the history affirming thrust of creation, incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection.

These final reflections on the cosmic scope of Christian hope - while seemingly speculative - show that such questions are very important in the search for a coherent understanding of the world in terms of the central events of the Christian faith. This coherent vision brings together the foundations of faith in the past, the expression of faith in the present, and the hopes of faith for the future. When eschatology is harnessed to today's urgent tasks of finding a sustainable economic strategy in terms of our threatened ecology (see further Wogaman, 1977:139-54), and of promoting peace and justice, we can be sure that it has its feet on the ground and is thinking and acting from our present experience of God's love and the hope it inspires.

Conclusions

We have argued that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection together form the ground and pattern of Christian hope. Although the resurrection is a different sort of event from Jesus' crucifixion it is important not to remove it from the sphere in which Jesus was crucified. If this happens the power of Christian hope to address our world is undermined radically.

In order to keep the hope in touch with our world in which it is needed we have insisted upon a view of Jesus' resurrection as an historical event. As the act of God's raising Jesus from death, resurrection shows the theological and historical character of Christian hope. Because the basis of this hope is in God's victory over death - ie the end of all our own human possibilities - it can hope for all things despite all things. The resurrection of Jesus shows that Jesus is the pattern for the actions of Christian hope. Therefore, the meaning and significance of the resurrection of Jesus must be seen as furnishing us with a whole vision of how God works in the world rather than the narrower interpretation in anthropological terms of the assurance of life after death. As such resurrection suggests a programme of action which is necessarily social and thus also political. Resurrection is an invitation to the practice of hope guided by the kind of involvement with our world which we see in the life, ministry and death of Jesus.

We may gain some limited entry to the mystery of Jesus' passion and Easter, but we must not over-invest in our speculative concepts, models and metaphors even when these are drawn from established philosophical and biblical-theological traditions. The challenge is to maintain the Christian doctrine of God while at the same time taking seriously the death of Jesus as an event internal to the life of God. To this extent metaphors of interruption are preferable to those of breakdown and fracture. The theology of Holy Saturday ought to be given more prominence in order to take Jesus' death as a temporal interruption in the life of God more seriously. The theology of creation and the theology of resurrection require to be brought together more since Jesus' acceptance of death is itself creative, he hands his life over into the hands of the creator, and the Father's raising of the Son from death is the first day of the new creation. The fact that the Father raised the Son from the dead confirms that there really was a proper human death and that this death took place inside and not outside of the life of God.

A trinitarian approach maintains the theocentric thrust of the Father's raising of the Son without reducing the contribution of the Son in overcoming death to a vanishing point. Indeed, while we cannot be sure how Jesus finally died, his acceptance of death in entrusting his life to the mystery of God is of supreme importance for Christian hope in the face of death. Even though hope announces the victory over death, the fact that we all have to die is in itself significant and positive theologically. Both the manner of Jesus' death and his eventual triumph make it possible to face dying hopefully. We must not try to short-circuit the human journey

to eternal life by failing to face honestly the fact of our mortality.

The Easter faith gives rise to a total hope which looks for a consummation of all things. The hope for life after death is an essential part of Christian belief. The general shape of the fulfilment hoped for can be indicated on the basis of our present experience of the love of God and expounded as part of an overall coherent vision of the Christian faith. This shows that the nature of Christian eschatology is anything but fanciful speculation about matters which cannot be known; it is a reflection upon this life and where it seems to be headed in God's purposes of love, and it carries important consequences for action now. In our sketch we tried to indicate three basic features of the eschatology which we consider to be most in keeping with the full range of Christian teaching about God, the world and being human. This led us to stress the bodily nature of the hope for life after death, the social nature of human fulfilment, and the overall context of a renewed creation.

The total victory of God's grace promised in resurrection requires a re-examination of the doctrine of hell and an exploration of the theological case for universalism. If this victory is to be achieved it will require space and time beyond this life since the perfection of human love cannot be achieved instantly upon death. We must therefore imagine a continued journey beyond death towards the final consummation. These matters form the subject of chapter three.

Jesus' resurrection does not leave this world behind. It has an active character and exercises its power in the world even now. This is why the Christian hope is not simply a matter of waiting for life after death but is a matter of action in the present. In a final chapter we shall explore Christian engagement with social and political change.

CHAPTER THREE

The Hope That All Shall Be Saved

Introduction

Reflection upon Christian hope must ask whether salvation includes only the Christian community or a wider grouping, perhaps even extending to all men and women. Clearly, Christian hope will be a very different matter depending on whether it envisages the salvation of many or all or only of a few. In the case of the latter one might be forgiven for thinking that, far from being a form of hope, Christian faith was actually more like a form of despair or at least of pessimism.

The question of the scope of salvation does not arise simply because we judge it an important indication of the kind of hope which Christians have. More importantly, we have to think about this because of the Christian doctrine of God. We must try to think of what sort of hope belongs to the Christian perception of the character and nature of God as he has revealed himself in the death and resurrection of Jesus. So at its most fundamental theological level the question of the scope of the salvation hoped for is a question about God.

It is most important to recognise that the question of universalism concerns the doctrine of God and the love of God, for failure to realise this often leads to a quite misplaced dismissal of the significance of the question. Even opponents of universalism, such as Bettis, acknowledge that '(t)he power of the argument for universalism is rooted in the persistence with which it pursues the theological logic of God's divine love' (1970:330). Rowell (1974:216-17) likewise insists that the question of hell is not theologically peripheral since it inevitably reflects upon the nature and character of God. The view that universalism is just a peripheral speculation in Christian theology must be rejected on the grounds that the question about the truth of universalism is really a question about the truth about God (Robinson, 1950:102). Indeed, if the question of the scope of salvation is asking about the love of God within the tradition which confesses 'God is love' (1 John 4.8), then it can hardly fail to be a most central and pressing one. Underestimation of the significance of the universalist's question in the past must be due in part to the highlighting of other features of God's character, as the history of the doctrine of hell exemplifies (see Walker, 1964). Even quite recently

McIntyre (1962:26) could complain about the surprising lack of significance given to the love of God in theological writing, even in the christocentric theology of the post-Liberal period of the twentieth century. His book is a very fine attempt to write about God from the perspective of this central Christian conviction, and it is surprising that few seem to have thought it worthwhile to develop his ideas. Newlands quite consciously follows McIntyre's stress on the love of God, also indicating the lack of regulative significance given to this in contemporary theology, which may be because '(t)alk of God is notoriously complex, and talk of love notoriously sentimental' (1980:9). This should alert us to the fact that one can make use of concepts like the love of God in a theologically dubious fashion, and it is undeniably true that the case for universalism has often traded upon rather questionable notions. Any acceptable contemporary theological case for universalism must be able to leave behind these notions and build itself upon a more substantial theological foundation.

Travis (1980:124) has noted that 'universalism has become an important topic of theological debate' and Norment (1979:285) adds that '(i)n part the importance of this trend lies in the fact that theologians of a universalist persuasion . . . may now increasingly be accounted significant rather than peripheral figures'. Indeed, it is most interesting to look at the work of some of the most able contemporary theologians and to discover how sympathetic they are to the hope that one day God's saving purposes shall be fully realised for all those whom he has created in love. It is not unfair to include here the work of von Balthasar (1983:150-53), Hendrikus Berkhof (1979:528-33), John Macquarrie (1978b:351-70), Juergen Moltmann (1981:94-96), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1972b:90-95), Karl Rahner (1969a; 1979), Helmut Thielicke (1982:453-56) and Geoffrey Wainwright (1980:458-61). Earlier this century we might think of the work of Karl Barth (1957:94-194; 1961a:461-78; 1961b:37-65), Emil Brunner (1954:170-84), H H Farmer (1935:255-59; 1938; 1948), Nels Ferre (1952:217-49), C S Lewis (1946), C F D Moule (1953), Ethelbert Stauffer (1955:222-25), Paul Tillich (1978c:394-423), and the lesser known Charles Duthie (1961). Going back further in British writing we might think of Thomas Erskine (1828) and F D Maurice (1957) and a long way back the thoughts of the Lady Julian of Norwich (1966:109-11). In the very first Christian centuries Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa and Origen are the best known exponents of universalism. Doubtless the inclusion of some of these writers is controversial, but at the moment we cite them only to show that at least a sympathetic reception of universalism has an excellent intellectual pedigree in the 20th century, and is not without significant support from

earlier periods of the Christian tradition. Even those listed from this century represent a variety of approaches and arguments, and their inclusion together is not intended to overlook this. Moreover, it is the case that some of those listed would want to reject universalism, two obvious examples being Maurice and Barth. The list would also furnish us with some good examples of universalism being buttressed in a rather suspect fashion, and accompanied by rather fanciful speculation. These observations show the need to indicate not simply that one is in favour of universalism, but more importantly what kind of universalism is intended.

Yet despite the presence of support for universalism from many eminent 20th century theologians, and Travis' perceptive comment that 'he who has not felt deeply the attraction of universalism can scarcely have been moved by the greatness of God's love' (1980:129-30), it cannot be overlooked that the Christian tradition has rejected universalism for the most part (see Bauckham, 1979; Glasson, 1969). The doctrine of apocatastasis which taught the restoration of all things is usually associated with the name of Origen, but it was also held by Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa. Kuehner (1968:24n) points out that since Origen's condemnation 'none of the major branches of the Christian Church - Roman, Eastern and Protestant - has held to universalism', or as Simon (1964:206) puts more bluntly, the tradition has never tolerated this 'ancient Origenist heresy'. It is evident that there has taken place something of a sea change when we consider that notwithstanding 'the voice of the Catholic Church which throughout all ages has consistently judged universalism as a heresy for faith and a menace to the Gospel' (Torrance, 1949:310), the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Doctrine in the Church of England explicitly stated that there must be room in the church 'for those who hold that the love of God will at last win penitence and answering love from every soul that it has created' (1938:219).

Nevertheless, the fact that the tradition is not in general in favour of universalism, and has until comparatively recently rejected it in its understanding of the doctrine of hell, means that the case for universalism can only be made today if it can be shown to derive from, and be urged by, a more consistent understanding and application of the Christian doctrine of God. Unquestionably, this is what has occurred in relation to the understanding of the doctrine of hell. It is a concern to think truly in a Christian fashion about God which causes many contemporary theologians to turn more sympathetically to universalism. We must start by examining what has always been considered one of the major obstacles to the hope for

universal salvation, namely, the claim that the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus stand opposed to it.

i The New Testament and universalism

(a) The teachings of Jesus

We shall begin with the teaching of Jesus. John Hick has made out a plausible case for thinking that 'the confident assertion that Jesus threatened, or predicted, eternal torment is not so securely based as has often been assumed'. However, he admits that we do have an instance of this in Matthew 25.31-46. 'This is the only passage in the recorded teachings of Jesus in the synoptic gospels in which eternal punishment is threatened and a final and permanent division is asserted between the saved and the damned' (1976:247, 245; cf Travis, 1980:135). It may be that Hick has underestimated the number of identifiable occasions on which Jesus spoke like this, but even the discovery of one such occasion is sufficient to present us with an apparent obstacle in the way of affirming universalism. We must therefore discuss this passage further.

As with most aspects of New Testament study, many different views have been expressed. We find that there is disagreement over whether this really is the parable of the sheep and the goats. Dodd (1978:65) and Filson (1960:266) think that it is not, whilst Hunter (1973:126), Ladd (1974a:118, 205, 206) and Mitton all believe that we do have a parable here and not some other form of teaching. Whether it be considered a parable or not, there is also the question of the focus or essential point of the teaching. For example, Mitton (1978:48-49) writes:

> Matthew makes the story into a representation of the Last Judgement. It is, however, clear that the purpose of the parable is not really to teach anything very precise about the Last Judgement. Rather it is using the symbol of the Last Judgement to emphasise in the strongest possible way those actions here on earth which God most warmly commends and those which he condemns. It is all about the kind of conduct God asks of his followers NOW.

Stendahl (1962:794) takes essentially the same approach when he states that here we have teaching about serving Christ in the least of the brethren for

the church awaiting the parousia. On the other hand, Schweizer (1971: 55-56) states that 'Matthew 25.31b-46 is an account of the last judgment whose basic features probably go back to Jesus himself' and Filson (1960: 266) characterises these verses as 'a description of the last judgment'. It has also been contested whether in fact this is a piece of teaching from Jesus. Hunter, Ladd and Mitton all believe that, despite some traces of Matthew's editorial role, we have here substantially the authentic voice of Jesus, but Sanders (1985:111) thinks the passage 'can hardly be authentic'. The factors often used to discount the dominical authenticity of this passage can in fact lead to quite the opposite conclusion, although Jesus showed himself to be adverse to the sense in which such teaching might normally be received by indicating that the righteous who receive eternal life are not his religious opponents (Bligh, 1971).

It is possible, although we cannot put it more strongly, that we have here at least one authentic recollection of Jesus' teaching which makes reference to at least the possibility of eternal punishment, even if, as seems likely, Jesus is not concerned to give details of this, and intends to make this, like his other parables, a call to decision in the present. We must be careful when we come across attempts to show that Jesus did not teach something which we now regard as embarrassingly harsh. The temptation to push the argument a little further than the evidence strictly warrants must always lie close at hand, simply because it would be much more convenient for us theologically if we could show that Jesus was not party to this! Hick (1976:242) tells us that '(t)he situation is that nearly all of us today would like to accept the universalist view but find ourselves hindered by the apparent impossibility of reconciling it with the reality of human freedom' and we could add 'the apparent impossibility of reconciling it with the teaching of the New Testament as a whole'.

It would not be fair to present arguments which seek to dissociate Jesus from such harsh teaching as simply dishonourable attempts to make Jesus fit into our own prescriptions about such things. We must also recognise that often such attempts derive from the apparent incongruity between this and other aspects of Jesus' teaching and ministry, and are an attempt to give these features primacy. The central focus of Jesus' preaching and actions was the divine initiative of God's saving grace, and he saw himself enacting this in his role as the Son of the Father. It was Jesus who gave the teaching about the Lost Sheep (Matthew 18.10-14; Luke 15.3-7), and most famously of all, the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32). Christians have seen in his ministry the very substance of the divine Father's embrace of his wayward children. If this is central to

Jesus' own understanding of God, then it is understandable why scholars question whether he did speak of eternal punishment. However, we cannot allow this to distort our assessment of the sources of what Jesus may have said. If the evidence causes us to think that Jesus probably did teach eternal punishment, even if only on a few occasions, then in faithfulness to him we must say so. If Jesus did teach these things then the sharp contrast of Hebrew poetry which is employed in the familiar imagery of the evening separation of mixed flocks of sheep and goats in Palestine, would have served to make more pronounced the seriousness of his teaching here (Tasker, 1961:238: Fenton, 1963:401).

(b) Wider scriptural evidence

Let us turn to the wider teaching of the New Testament. Barclay (1967:235-36) asks the question whether there is any scriptural evidence for universalism and, after considering a wide array of texts (Luke 3.6; John 12.32; Romans 5.18, 11.32; 1 Corinthians 15.22, 24-28; Ephesians 1.10; 1 Timothy 2.3-5, 4.10; Titus 2.11; 2 Peter 3.9; Hebrews 2.9; 1 John 2.2), concludes that '(u)nquestionably the evidence exists, and it is strong'. His judgement would presumably have been even more favourable had he also considered Colossians 1.19, a text which gave Barth (1961b:61) great hope, the great Pauline passage which runs from Romans 8.31-39, and other suggestive texts such as Revelation 21.4 and 22.1-3 and 1 Peter 3.19-20 and 4.6 (cf Walker, 1964:33). However, there are several important objections to the suggestion that the New Testament gives support to universalism. Most importantly Travis says that the texts to which appeal is frequently made 'cannot bear the weight which some universalists have wished to put on them. The wider context of these verses makes a universalist interpretation impossible to sustain'. He also observes that the tortuous progress envisaged in universalist schemes such as Hick's is 'quite different from Jesus' message of present salvation to be received or lost in immediate response to his preaching' (1982:202, 204). Travis' criticisms are particularly interesting because he shows real sympathy towards universalism and is critical of the traditional approach. He agrees that such texts as we have mentioned 'suggest a wider hope and a more enterprising and comprehensive approach to mission than most Christians have ever entertained. Yet such texts cannot justifiably be used as an argument for universal salvation' (1980:132). Hanson (1969a:152) concurs when he tells us '(i)t is difficult to resist the conclusion that the NT on the whole is not on the side of universalism, the belief that ultimately all men will be saved'.

(c) Scripture and theology

The matter may not be settled so easily. Theological questions are not solved by simply quoting Scripture and logging proof-texts, not because scriptural teaching is of no importance, but rather because what is scriptural teaching is not so easily described, and the role which such teaching plays in the formation of a contemporary theology not so straightforward. Travis (1980:120-32) and Barclay (1967:231-39) combine a discussion of texts with a discussion of theological and philosophical problems, and relate the one group of questions to the other. Hence Travis lays great stress on the biblical teaching about the freedom of man and the seriousness of the consequences of its abuse, and Barclay (1967:238, 239) rests his hope on 'the total impression of the Gospel' which gives us a picture of God 'not of a king who is satisfied with a victory which destroys his enemies, but of a Father who can never be content even when a single child of his is outside the circle of his love'. This is very important because it suggests how different scholars come to different conclusions whilst assessing the same material. It is what one regards as the ultimate fact, the most important element of the total context, which will determine how one reads the evidence. The decision about what is ultimate is not simply a matter of weighing texts, but even more a question of theological judgement. That theological judgement is, of course, shaped and informed by the reading of the text, but it also has a prior and regulative aspect to it which predisposes the reader to give more or less weight to certain strands in the text from the very beginning. This analysis corresponds very closely to that of Kelsey (1975) in his study of the relations between Scripture and theology. Thus universalists are likely to take their stand on the conviction that God will never let us go until he has brought us to himself, while those who reject universalism are likely to believe that it belongs to our God-given freedom and to the nature of love itself that the issue cannot be forced from the side of God, and that we can go on refusing his love to the point at which salvation is lost. Fairhurst (1970:77) wants to maintain the possibility of a universal outcome 'on the conviction that however autonomous freewill may be it cannot be the same kind of ultimate as the love of God expressed in Jesus Christ'. Travis would reject universalism because of a different understanding of the relation between freedom and love, although he would still affirm the primacy of God's love in some sense. The decision which one makes about this has been influenced by the texts, but it in itself also influences the reception of the various texts by providing an

interpretive canon.

Travis cannot agree that texts such as 1 Corinthians 15.28 support universalism because the framework of Paul's thought is against this. He is not in any way seeking to detract from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, but he believes that man's stubborn rebellion can cause him to so refuse grace that the possibility of salvation may go beyond his reach. This is an argument which is undeniably present in the scriptural witness and even universalists for the most part would not want to deny this. But to allow such texts to count conclusively against a universal hope is also to make a theological commitment. Berkhof, Fairhurst, Hick and Robinson all share a broadly similar approach to the apparently two different groupings of texts in the New Testament. Berkhof (1969:62) probably takes the negative statements more seriously than the others when he discusses the problem of 'The Double Image of the Future' for it is only 'he who has learned to tremble at the possibility of rejection [who] may speak about the salvation of all men', and '(t)his can only be confessed by the believing church as the last secret . . . [which] can only be said at the end'. Robinson sought to deal with the negative statements by suggesting that here we have an existential truth in the form of myth. He thus referred to the myth of the great separation of Matthew 25.31-46 which cannot be a literal prediction because otherwise the two different sets of statements could not be held together. He seems to say that both sets of statements are myths, but this is a little confusing as it is also clear that he regards the universal statements as in some sense predictions of the end. He must do so if he is a universalist. Robinson struggles hard to take the negative side most seriously and insists that we must preserve the reality of human freedom and the seriousness of hell; only the man who has been confronted by both the possibilities of heaven and hell can be saved. The universalist preaches hell not with his tongue in cheek but because the two myths represent the two sides of the truth: from God's side that Christ includes all, and from man's side that nevertheless Christ must be chosen. But hell is an ultimate impossibility because <u>already</u> nobody is outside of Christ. From our side rejection is irreversible and leads to eternal death, but from God's side he cannot let things rest there, the victory of his love not compromising our human freedom (1950:100, 109, 118, 119, 120, 123). Fairhurst (1970:90-91) is critical of Robinson's use of myth but at the end of the day he seems to settle for something not entirely different. Hick also distinguishes between the two groups of statements when he says that Jesus issues existential warnings whilst Paul is writing theology for the church. 'These two sets of statements differ not only in their content but

also in the type of utterances that they are; and it is this latter difference which suggests the possibility of their ultimate compatibility' (1976:248). While there is undoubtedly some validity in this division, Hick is in danger of forgetting that Paul could also warn of the dangers of refusing the grace of God in a way which would seem to imply particularism and we might ask whether one can have an existential threat which does not relate to a future existential reality.

The various writers we have been considering would all claim that they are being true to the New Testament, but the problem is that this concept of 'being true to the New Testament' carries no single undisputed meaning. For example, it is quite likely that many, but not all, of the texts which are advanced in favour of universalism will not carry the burden of proof they are asked to bear. In that sense Travis probably represents Paul more accurately than the others. There may be grounds for suggesting that Robinson, Hick and others are casting a more favourable light on some texts than is strictly warranted; they are in danger of replacing what Paul actually said with what they think he should have said. Having said that we must be fair and stress that Travis fails to ask the question about what Paul should have said. Those who argue for universalism often claim that they are following the logic of the gospel of the profound self-giving of God for our salvation in Jesus Christ when they reflect upon questions of ultimate destiny. It cannot be denied that when they take their stand on the utterly committed redemptive love of God in Jesus they are arguing from the heart of the New Testament witness. If they struggle with Paul, and perhaps even distort aspects of his work from time to time, it is because they believe that he was not always true to his own best insights. It is a case of arguing against Paul for Paul's sake, and more especially for the sake of the gospel.

This means that it is not at all clear what is meant by saying that a specific idea or proposal is biblical, and beyond that, but not unrelated, what the relation is between Scripture and theology. The critical tension between exegesis and theology must be maintained. We cannot avoid asking whether some ideas are compatible with what we believe to be the nature of God in Christ. Yet we should not be so arrogant as to assume that this totally escaped the minds of the biblical writers, nor should we be so foolish as to think that we can discover the nature of God apart from reflecting upon Scripture, above all upon the accounts of Jesus' passion and its meaning and significance according to the New Testament authors. There is no absolute point from which one can assess the theological adequacy of any statement made by either a biblical or post-biblical

writer. Nevertheless, in a spirit of open debate where this is acknowledged, there is no reason why one cannot indicate clearly how one intends to establish one's argument and at least this should facilitate critical and constructive discussion of the different stances which are taken within the Christian community on such disputed issues. There are signs in the debate about universalism that both proponents and opponents are coming to agree that the central issue is how we are to think of the love of God.

The criterion of theological adequacy is the doctrine of God and more specifically the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. We learn of this through the scriptural witnesses, but we must also be free to criticise some of their statements. To make this kind of theological criticism is an attempt to be faithful to their central intention, ie to witness to the saving love of God in Christ. The suggestion here is that we must not simply repeat the statements and formulations of Scripture, but critically appropriate them in such a way that we ask about their adequacy as vehicles for what they seek to convey. Wenham (1974:33) makes the interesting remark that universalism is plausible, but no more than plausible, only if Scripture be deemed self-contradictory. This remark is interesting because Wenham is predisposed not to accept that such contradictions may exist in the Bible due to his conservative evangelical stance - yet another example of the interplay between theological and exegetical decisions - and also because it raises the question of the internal consistency of the Bible. Hick (1976:248) admits that one can use Paul to argue for or against universalism, but then adds:

> I would not in fact claim with confidence that he was a universalist; though I suspect that sometimes as he wrote about the saving activity of God the inner logic of that about which he was writing inevitably unfolded itself into the thought of universal salvation.

In other words, we must go beyond asking about what Paul did say and ask about what he <u>should</u> have said. For example, should Paul have carried further the logic of his refusal to give up Israel and extended it to all men, as he seems to get to in verses 31 and 32 of Romans 11? It is surely not a concidence that the argument about Israel in chapters 9-11 follows immediately after the great closing verses of chapter 8, in which Paul declares that:

> Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (vv 38, 39).

Although he writes these words to Christians, on what basis can one deny their applicability to all? At any rate, it is clear from verses 31 to 35 that he is impelled to write these words when he considers that the crucifixion of Jesus is the visible demonstration that in fact nothing can separate us from the love of God.

If it is this understanding of God which lies at the heart of the New Testament witness, then we must ask whether other biblical statements serve to illuminate this insight further or whether on occasions they in fact obscure this central conviction about God. In this connection it is worth pondering the words of Rahner and Weger (1980b:121):

> To be honest, we must also admit that the emphasis in the New Testament statements on eschatology do not simply and invariably reflect what ought to be the main elements in such eschatological statements if they took their cue from the cross of Jesus, in which God's victorious mercy becomes visible and irreversible in its triumph over evil in the world.

It ought to be possible to espouse a position, for example, which probably neither Jesus nor Paul taught, and yet claim that this position is more adequate theologically and is 'biblical' because it derives from the most profound insights of the biblical and dominical witness to God.

If Jesus embodies the truth about God especially in his death, the search for theological adequacy can only be a seeking after the God seen in Jesus' passion. Some common objections to universalism perhaps fail to reckon seriously enough with this theological concern at the heart of universalism.

ii Common objections to universalism

(a) Scripture and tradition

It is often objected that universalism is against the teaching of Scripture; so too it can be objected that the 'majority report' of the tradition is against it. Thus it can be argued that it is in conflict with the two main authorities of Christian belief. Since Scripture and tradition seek above all to bear witness to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ, we have the responsibility of criticising the statements of both to ensure that what is said properly expresses this love. There is no independent absolute point from which the criterion of theological adequacy can be drawn because we learn of the love of God from Scripture itself and all theology is subject to human finitude. If the case for universalism can show that it is a possible development of what the gospel tells us about the character and nature of God as love, the first objection to universalism fails. It is possible to envisage a universalist position with at least as much right to claim to be 'biblical' and true to the tradition as the position which seeks to deny it. The same critical principle must be applied to later tradition as well as to Scripture, particularly since tradition seeks to be true to the intent of Scripture. The 'minority report' of tradition in which the hope for universal salvation can be found shows that tradition is not monolithic and contains some pointers towards the kind of critical work we are undertaking.

(b) The urgency of the gospel

A second common objection to universalism is that it hinders the preaching of the gospel by removing the urgency and necessity of placing one's trust in Christ for salvation. Marshall's statement that '(t)he doctrine of universalism inevitably weakens the moral and spiritual responsibility of men and blunts the evangelistic and missionary fervour of the church' is a good example of this objection (1978:138). Torrance (1949:18) obviously shares this objection when he writes:

> It is the infinite urgency of the situation that life and death hang in the balances and that it is possible to choose death as well as life. No doctrine that cuts the nerve of that urgency in the Gospel can be a doctrine of love, but only an abiding menace to the Gospel and to mankind.

Those who advocate universalism need not deny the urgency and necessity of faith in Christ. We take it to be axiomatic that any acceptable universalist account must insist that it is only by placing one's faith in Christ that one may enter into the fulness of salvation. The universalist simply wants to insist that God's involvement with mankind will eventually bring about the loving response of all those whom he has created and for whom Christ died. This does mean that anyone wanting to argue that all shall eventually come to love God must envisage a history between God and man which is not closed at the point of death, and it is for this reason that we shall have to examine the question of purgatory towards the end of this chapter. Theologians such as Marshall and Torrance reject the idea of purgatory as being contrary to Scripture, and so must conclude that universalism does not take seriously the biblical demand for faith in Christ since this is clearly not present in many people before they die. Taking this life as the total framework for decision they must also conclude that universalists do not heed the seriousness of the possibility of loss of salvation if one does not turn towards Christ in this life. This is not fair to the universalist position since it is to judge it on the basis of premises which it does not accept, and so has too restricted a view of what a universalist might be able to say. Thus the question of what we take to be the boundaries of the total framework of God's interaction with men and women is extremely important. The universalist does not believe that those who fail to respond to God in this life are lost, but would have to say that if someone never comes to faith in Christ then he or she will be lost. The universalist denies that this possibility will become actuality, or at least, and this is better, theological reasons to hope that such a tragic end will not come to pass are given. In this sense the universalist's position does not entail a seriousness in relation only to this life, but whether this is a defect depends upon whether the universalist is correct about the total framework. The universalist hope need not be without a final and ultimate seriousness, but the point at which God's love can no longer bring people back to himself, if this is to be imagined at all, is very much further down the road than is perhaps all too readily assumed by those who are clearly not universalists.

It could also be said that so far the discussion of urgency and seriousness has worked only with the threat side and this is a very dubious approach. It is surely the case that the urgency and seriousness of response to the gospel is not simply or primarily a matter of what dreadful consequences may befall one if one fails to do so, but rather because of

the greatness of what God has done for us and wants to continue to do for us in Christ. The gospel is always an offer of life and only by implication the possibility of death, and it seeks the grateful response of love rather than the self-seeking refuge of fear. When we think of seriousness in this positive light we can see that there is no reason why a belief in eventual universal salvation should provide any legitimate reason for a man or woman to take the invitation to respond to the gospel today with anything less than total seriousness. One may not be lost through indecision today on account of God's continuing mercy, but one certainly ought to respond today. One cannot really believe the gospel message about God's love for us in Christ and then find good reason to stay outside of the Christian community.

It is because God will not accept a sinful world but seeks to redeem it for righteousness that judgement and salvation are inextricably linked. This brings us to another common objection to universalism, namely that it fails to pay due attention to the theme of judgement. If we hold together the themes of love and judgement, we shall be critical of destructive, almost sadistic, notions of God's judgement, and shall prefer to think of the righteous creator and redeemer who renews all things. There is no reason whatsoever why a universalist argument should omit this dimension, and in fact it will include this as part of its stress on God's continuing saving activity. Salvation comes through judgement. The universalist will not seek to minimise this but must do full justice to it precisely because of the hope that all shall be saved. Talk of universalism need not undermine moral seriousness and may in fact be rooted in a serious moral concern that justice be done, the difference being that it has a particular view of what it means that justice be done (see Rowell, 1974:120).

(c) The importance of human freedom

A further objection to universalism is that it denies human freedom. If this could be shown to be the case then the argument for universalism would have to be dropped since it is most important that those who find themselves in heaven should have chosen to love God freely. We cannot talk about faith and love without freedom. This admitted, the notion of freedom is a very difficult one. If we reflect upon human existence we see that there can be no such thing as absolute freedom. This sort of freedom is a myth because all human freedom is finite freedom. Social conditioning and the social nature of human existence mean that whatever freedom we have it is always a curtailed freedom. This demonstrates that the notion of

freedom must be understood in relation to the limitations and purposes of human existence. It must be understood in terms of finitude, sociality and creaturehood. In common life we find that we are most truly and freely ourselves in those situations and relationships which require self-sacrifice, self-limitation and self-giving. The fundamental importance of love for human life provides an important clue to the theological mystery of human existence. The gospel invites us to believe that human existence is constituted in such a way that we become our true selves in the freedom which exists in self-giving and obedience. 'Thy service is perfect freedom'. Christian hope must operate with this theological understanding of freedom if it is to avoid betraying itself.

We must avoid the error of thinking that a situation in which all people come to love God places a question mark against the freedom of such actions. It is quite possible to argue that such an outcome is the result of the ceaseless efforts of the God who creates true freedom. Thus Robinson (1950:111, cf 122-123) talks of God's love bestowing freedom upon men and eliciting the response in which we are truly free. Faith believes that one is only truly free when one loves God, that one discovers only in that way what our freedom is for and how it is to be realised. Hick (1976; but cf Walls, 1985:163) argues that there is no fundamental incompatability between asserting that all are free and yet believing that one day all shall come to love God, and most interestingly he has done this by reviving the old Augustinian argument that we have an inbuilt bias towards our maker ('our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee'):

> Thus God does not have to coerce us to respond to him, for he has already so created us that our nature, seeking its own fulfilment and good, leads us to him. The notion of divine coercion is set aside by the fact of divine creation.

This fact does not prejudice our freedom since '(a)ny usable notion of human freedom must be compatible with our having been created with the nature that we actually have' (1976:252, 256; cf Norment, 1979:300). Although Hick and others have shown that universalism is compatible with human freedom, the very fact of this freedom leaves room for a tragic end to God's involvement with humanity which cannot be decisively ruled out. For the moment it is sufficient to make the point that:

> If the Christian hope is fulfilled in God's long future it will surely be not because God has beaten down all resistance

> but because with the ingenuity of his tireless grace He has found a means whereby to bring about the glad and free surrender of all. Whatever new forms it may assume that means will still be what we Christians call the way of the Cross (Duthie, 1961:171).

(d) A sentimental gospel?

The next objection can be discussed quite briefly. This is the objection that universalism rests on a misplaced sentimentalising of the love of God. Marshall (1978:138) says that universalism 'has no support in Scripture and a false soft-heartedness should not blind us to what is taught there: the awful responsibility of accepting the gospel in this life'. Wenham (1974:176) claims that he has deliberately stressed the severity of God because Christian faith has been made incredible by sentimentalising the love of God. The history of the doctrine of hell shows how in fact such severity may be a liability in the view of a sensitive society. There is a vast difference between sentimentality and moral and theological sensitivity, and it is the latter which is the driving force behind the case for universalism. It is a concern for the preservation of the character and nature of God and the victory of his love which drives some theologians down the path to universalism. It is quite mistaken to suggest that someone who asks whether the God who so loves the world in Christ can ever give anyone up is guilty of misplaced sentimentality. It is not sentimentality to ask this question, but it may be a mistake to assume that God's love will eventuallly lead to everyone being saved.

(e) Barth and universalism

Finally we must say something about an objection which is often linked to Barth's thoughts about universalism, namely, that it rests on a fallacious way of thinking about the love and goodness of God. It will be useful to set the record straight about what Barth said on the subject of universalism before going any further, especially since those on either side of the debate are often guilty of rather selective use of Barth. It cannot be denied that Barth was greatly drawn towards universalism. This was the case particularly because of his understanding of grace and his doctrine of election. Towards the end of his section on 'The Falsehood and Condemnation of Man' he clearly feels most strongly the pressure of his own

commitment to the ultimate and supreme reality of the grace of God in Christ towards universalism. He even admits that 'theological consistency might seem to lead our thoughts and utterances most clearly in this direction' but then immediately refuses to commit himself to universalism because 'we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift' (1961a:477). Busch (1976:394) relates that Barth once said to one of his friends who was a preacher of universalism, 'I don't believe in universalism, but I do believe in Jesus Christ, the reconciler of all'. That is a nice summary of Barth's position because he would not allow universalism as something which we could count upon as a claim against God, and yet he was deeply suspicious of an excessive negativeness in Christian thinking about these matters because he was quite convinced that we have no right to place any limit to the grace of God in Christ. The sentences following his refusal to accept universalism are:

> Secondly, there is no good reason why we should forbid ourselves, or be forbidden, openness to the possibility that in the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ there is contained much more than we might expect and therefore the supremely unexpected withdrawal of that final threat, ie, that in the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant promise of the final deliverance of all men.

Thus although 'forbidden to count on this as though we had a claim to it, as though it were not supremely the work of God to which man can have no possible claim, we are surely commanded the more definitely to hope and pray for it' (1961a:477-78). That this is Barth's position is confirmed by his famous essay on 'The Humanity of God' in which he was forced to ask whether God's affirmation of man, because it includes the divine 'No' in itself, leads to universalism. He offered three comments which he did not intend to be either for or against. First, we should resist all immediate panic and calmly seek to discover the meaning of this. Second, he thought that we should find stimulation in Colossians 1.19 'to consider whether the concept could not perhaps have a good meaning' and added that '(t)he same can be said of parallel passages'. Third, he expressed his opinion that an excessive negativeness may be of greater danger here than the danger of antinomianism often alluded to. In a refreshingly positive and hopeful spirit he wrote:

> This much is certain, that we have no theological right to set any sort of limits to the loving-kindness of God which has appeared in Jesus Christ. Our theological duty is to see and understand it as being still greater than we had seen before (1961b:60, 61, 62).

Barth cannot be used to count decisively either for or against universalism.

Barth refused to endorse universalism because he would not allow us to think that we have any claim upon God that would threaten the divine sovereign freedom. Hick (1976:260) comments that '(b)ecause of the absolute divine independence and freedom we may not propound a doctrine of God's goodness and love and then proceed to draw the universalist conclusion from it'. Barth (1957:417) wrote in his doctrine of election:

> If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it must and will finally be coincident with the world of man as such (as in the doctrine of the so-called apokatastasis). No such right or necesssity can legitimately be deduced. Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so He does not need to elect or call all mankind.

It is this aspect of Barth's critique which Bettis has seized upon in order to refute universalism. Bettis' argument is important because he agrees that the central issue concerns the love of God and that often critics of universalism have missed this. He realises that 'the distinction must be made between a theological doctrine of universalism and a doctrine of the unlimited possibilities for God's love', such that 'while universal salvation is always a possibility for God's free love, universalism as a theological proposition is unacceptable'. We should accept the universalist's contention that 'theological propositions should reflect as adequately as possible that God is good and that God is sovereign' but he questions whether universalism is the best description of this. Universalism rests on a fallacious humanistic premise which makes 'the goodness and greatness of God's love depend on what it does for men' (1970: 340, 336). Barth recognised this dangerous premise and rejected it since '(t)o say that God is love because He saves men is to say that apart from men God would not be love'. (Here Bettis is in danger of confusing the ordo cognoscendi and ordo essendi and the argument may involve a logical non sequitur. God would only not be love in the absence of men if he was

love only because he saved men.) Thus Bettis remarks that 'Barth does not reject universalism because of its reach to all men but because its premise defines God in terms of what He does for men'. The problem is not that universalism ties God to all men but that it ties God to men at all' (1967:428, 429). This turns God into an idol, but by contrast God's love 'is free not only in that the world has no claim on God and does not merit his love, but also in that there is no necessity in God's love for the world' (1970:339). We must now respond to this objection to universalism.

Hick criticises Barth quite severely by suggesting that far from protecting the divine freedom he has in fact limited that freedom since 'he is saying that in order to be sovereignly free God must remain, in relation to us, arbitrary and unpredictable'. He also accuses Barth of being guilty of 'an anthropomorphic conception of freedom which denies to the Creator the ultimate freedom to commit himself to man', which prompts the question:

> Is there not even something presumptuous about a theology which forbids us so to respond to God's self-revelation that we rely upon it and rejoice in it and proclaim it with its final implications as good news for all mankind? (1976:261).

Such savage criticism is not fair to Barth's thelogy as a whole but there is certainly a danger that his strong emphasis on the sovereign Lordship of God might introduce an element of arbitrariness thus undercutting faith which rests on the constancy of his will towards us. Support for this suspicion about Barth can also be found in Moltmann's critique of his view of God's decision to create. Moltmann asks '(d)oes God really not need those whom in the suffering of his love he loves unendingly?' Moltmann admits that Barth himself was not happy with the nominalist strains in his understanding of the divine freedom, and modified this to bring to prominence the thought that God's self-determination is a free overflowing of his goodness, and it is this idea which Moltmann himself takes up (1981:53, 54). However, the question is not really whether God could have done without creating the world but rather what God commits himself to once he has created the world. Bettis' charge of humanism never really comes to terms with this. It is one thing to say that God is love independent of the existence of humanity, but it is quite another to say that his being love is not tied to what he does in relation to the world and humanity once they have appeared upon the scene. When God undertook the risk of creation his love embarked upon a new adventure and cannot involve the indifference which Bettis seems to think quite possible.

Both Bettis and Barth realise that God most certainly has not remained indifferent to our plight but their thinking that he could have done so is what tinges their approaches with a fatal arbitrariness which cannot be a reflection of the God who is involved in the passion of Jesus. Bettis and Barth may be correct in thinking that universalism is guilty of inappropriately tying God's love to the salvation of all but this is not because God could still be love even if he did nothing for man.

Although we have found it necessary to be critical of a certain threatened arbitrariness in Barth's doctrine of God it would be quite unfair to leave matters as they stand. Barth understood only too well that it was the theologian's responsibility to communicate the passionate love which God has for the world and which was seen in Christ. Through his use of the concept of covenant he stressed God's commitment to the world made in and through Jesus Christ. Moreover, he made it quite clear that God binds himself to human welfare. This is the meaning of the humanity of God:

> The humanity of God! Rightly understood that is bound to mean God's relation to and turning towards man . . . the free grace in which He wills to be and is nothing other than the God of man.

When Barth uttered these words he was offering a corrective to the great stress on the divine Lordship of the early period of his theology. 'It is precisely God's <u>deity</u> which, rightly understood, includes his <u>humanity</u>' (1961b:37, 46). The divine sovereignty is exercised in being for us, and it is God's good pleasure to choose this for himself. Neither Bettis nor Moltmann refer to Barth's essay on 'The Humanity of God' yet this later stress poses serious difficulties for both Moltmann's critique and Bettis' interpretation of Barth. There is some substance to the writing of Bettis and Moltmann but their treatment may scarcely be said to be fair.

Some have wondered whether Barth was entitled to reject universalism on his <u>own</u> terms. Barth very creatively and very properly addressed himself to reformulating the doctrine of election and double predestination christologically. Christ is the one who is both elected and rejected for all. 'He is <u>the</u> Rejected, as and because He is <u>the</u> Elect. In view of His election, there is no other rejected but Himself' (1957:353). Brown (1967:132) understands this to mean that for Barth '(m)an as such can never be rejected. Man as such can never know the wrath and desolation which

Christ knew on the cross. For Christ has taken it all upon Himself'. It is because of Barth's stress on election that Berkouwer (1966:295) argues that Barth cannot resist universalism by an appeal to God's freedom:

> Barth's opposition to all synergism has brought him to the verge of the apokatastasis. At this edge boundaries are fixed in order to accentuate the existential seriousness of the human decision. This problem arises from the thesis of the factual election of all. The light, therefore, does not remain unobscured. Clouds begin to surround it. When Barth's vision has been pursued to the end, it is no longer possible to appeal to God's freedom in election. Barth considered it his duty to point out the danger of arbitrariness, of the 'deus absconditus', in the Reformed doctrine of election. But for this very reason he cannot counter the apokatastasis doctrine by pointing to God's freedom. For, according to Barth, it was precisely <u>this</u> freedom which was not arbitrary, but the freedom whereby He bound Himself in love, namely, in the concreteness of <u>the</u> decision: the election of Jesus Christ.

McIntyre (1962:137) would seem to agree with this when he notes that Barth's recasting of the doctrine of election means that 'here is universalism with a vengeance'. However, Brown (1967:137) thinks that 'Barth has drastically changed the New Testament message' and has substituted something else which 'can only foster a false and dangerous optimism'. Duthie (1961:165) argues for universalism after gratefully acknowledging the massive emphasis in Barth's theology on 'the outgoing, world-embracing, utterly faithful, endlessly self-spending grace of God towards mankind' but he feels that Barth does not take human freedom and response as seriously as the New Testament does. Hartwell (1964:187) raises the same doubt about Barth's treatment when he writes:

> If Jesus Christ has already objectively accomplished man's reconciliation with God by His own reconciling work, in other words, if all men are already objectively justified, sanctified and called in Jesus Christ, the question arises why in this case the subjective reconciliation is needed to 'complete' the work of reconciliation . . . On the other hand, if the subjective reconciliation is still necessary for

> the completion of the work of reconciliation, what is the meaning of the objective completeness of the work of reconciliation, in particular with regard to those who refuse to acknowledge and accept their reconciliation with God?

Hartwell goes on to suggest that Barth means that one must only acknowledge and accept what Christ has done, and of course Barth's doctrine of reconciliation includes the role of the Holy Spirit in the subjective appropriation of Christ's reconciliation. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility that this subjective fulfilment will not come to fruition unless we can find compelling grounds in the gospel itself to believe that God's grace will always triumph over sin and evil. Barth's theology seems to point powerfully in the direction of the divine victory.

The objections which we have been considering in this section are by no means unanswerable and certainly do not rule out the possibility of giving a theologically acceptable account of universalism. Their significance is that they serve to indicate the necessary features which must be included in any theologically responsible account of universalism.

iii The Christian doctrine of God as the basis of the hope that all shall be saved

The argument of this section is that it is the peculiarly Christian doctrine of God which is the real justification for the hope that all shall be saved even if we cannot completely discount the possibility that some may not attain to salvation. It is important to state this from the outset so that the kind of universal hope which we consider necessary is protected from misunderstanding. Universalism has taken many forms and argued from various premises. Our argument is from the grace of God and does not assume questionable notions such as the immortality of the soul which have bedevilled earlier forms of universalism. Our hope for the salvation of all derives from the very centre of the gospel's understanding of God. The argument is a strong one and difficult to resist but it does not provide us with a necessary conclusion. Here again some earlier forms of universalism have erred by thinking that one could deduce with logical necessity the salvation of all. Torrance points out that the real problem with universalism 'lies not in proving the love of God to be universal and omnipotent but in laying down the impossibility of ultimate damnation'. The fact of universal salvation remains a matter of hope. 'Whether all men

will as a matter of fact be saved or not, in the nature of the case, cannot be known' (Torrance, 1949:312, 314).

(a) The logic of death and resurrection

It is the experience of having been brought back to God through Christ which constitutes the Christian community and shapes that community's concept of God. In particular the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection have impressed themselves upon the Christian consciousness as containing the central core of the Christian confession about God. To speak of those things is to be compelled to speak of the passion of God for the world which he creates and redeems in love. In the totality of cross and resurrection we see the saving power of God's love overturning the consequences of sin and evil and undoing their unrelenting movement towards death. Christian faith recognises in Jesus' death the total self-giving of God for the sake of the world, and this is what the doctrines of incarnation and trinity seek to convey. McIntyre (1962:68-70) has argued rightly that love means commitment and that in Jesus God commits his whole self to us for all time. It is not just that the cross is a phase in God's dealings with mankind, as if having discharged his responsibilities towards us there he might cease to act lovingly towards us at some point in the future. The empty tomb is the effective sign of God's invincible commitment not to give us up to sin and death and to ceaselessly pursue us with his love, the cross the promise of the infinite pain which such love is willing to bear.

Faith sees the promise of God's final victory over sin and death in Jesus' resurrection. In Jesus God encountered the full weight of human rebelliousness yet triumphed over it as suffering and death blossomed into the inconquerable life of the resurrection. The resurrection means that love is not quenched upon the cross but is placed irremoveably at the heart of the world's sinfulness so that its redemption might always lie close at hand. Thus we might say that the victory of grace as the very logic of the gospel drives us towards universalism. In Jesus the divine 'Yes' is seen to be greater than the human 'No'; sin and death do not overcome love and life at the end of the day. God's saving grace responds to human opposition by pouring itself out all the more. Thus the Lady Julian taught that our falling 'is not so much a falling into sin as a falling into the arms of God's mercy (Llewelyn 1982:22). This means that 'our betrayal is not the ultimate fact in the world' (Williams, 1982: 41-42). The ultimate truth of the world is the truth and victory of God's

love, and not the persistence and depth of human sinfulness. Barth (1962:477) took essentially the same position when he wrote that 'the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ is superior to the pseudo-reality to which we are delivered by our falsehood'. Paul Tillich (1978c:407, 408) also felt the pressure of the logic of grace towards universal salvation in his own particular way when having defined the important concept of essentialization as that which 'emphasizes the despair of having wasted one's potentialities yet also assures the elevation of the positive within existence (even in the most unfulfilled life) into eternity', he then states that:

> The doctrine of the ambiguity of all human goodness and of the dependence of salvation on the divine grace alone either leads us back to the doctrine of double predestination or leads us forward to the doctrine of universal essentialization.

This bears close similarity to Barth's rejection of any kind of synergism.

(b) Analogies for God's love

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in this area is to know what sort of analogies from the experience of human relationships are appropriate for the love of God. On the basis of an analysis of human relationships Vanstone raises the possibility of the frustration of God's loving purposes. This possibility exists because of the very nature of love itself since '(h)e who loves surrenders into other hands the issue and outcome of his own aspiration - its denouement as triumph or as tragedy'. Love cannot control the 'other' from whom it seeks a response. 'Herein lies the poignancy of love, and its potential tragedy. The activity of love contains no assurance or certainty of completion: much may be expended and little achieved'. Thus it is that all true love is precarious and the lover must take on the role of a waiting figure. Vanstone moves from his general consideration of the phenomenology of love (ch 3) to the elucidation of an understanding of God's creative and redemptive activity which corresponds to this (ch 4, 'The Kenosis of God'). In this he stresses that the outcome is indeed precarious:

> The Kenosis of God means that, for the being of the universe, the being of God is totally expended, without residue and

> without reserve: expended in endless and precarious endeavour of which the issue, as triumph or tragedy, has passed from His hands to depend upon the response which His love receives. That response will not destroy or diminish His love: but it will mark it as triumphant or tragic love.

And yet although the shape of the outcome cannot be predetermined and the sought-after triumph foreknown, the creation is still 'safe' because of the infinite resourcefulness of God's grace:

> If the creation is the work of love, its 'security' lies not in its conformity to some predetermined plan but in the unsparing love which will not abandon a single fragment of it, and man's assurance must be the assurance not that all that happens is determined by God's plan but that all that happens is encompassed by His love.

Even where tragedy does occur God's love will not let matters rest there:

> Where the issue is tragedy, there remains only the unbelievable power of art or love to discover within itself, through the challenge of the tragic, the power which was not there before - the power of yet further endeavour to win back and redeem that which was going astray.

This is the meaning of God's utter self-expenditure upon the cross (1977:52, 49, 46, 69-70, 63, 66, 119-20).

Vanstone's argument involves the possibility of divine failure while expressing a final conviction that his love shall triumph. This final confidence stems from the infinite resourcefulness of God's grace. The fact that the one who struggles with us is infinitely resourceful points to a severe limitation of Vanstone's analogy from human love. The love which encounters us is the love of the creator and cannot be subject to the limitations of the persuasion of human love. Vanstone's model is too anthropomorphically conceived since God's power of persuasion must infinitely transcend the power of human resistance. The love of God does not force its way upon us. If Christ embodies this love we see how humbly, patiently, vulnerably it comes to us, but it cannot be overcome just as surely as cross leads to resurrection. The love of the creator must triumph since it is impossible for created reality to overcome the power of

divine being. The love which hands over the outcome to the other is human but the love of God is not powerless in this way since it is infinitely resourceful and cannot be made subject to our actions. The doctrines of incarnation and trinity remind us that the love which encounters the world in Christ is the love of the creator. To the extent that Vanstone's analogy overlooks the distinction between the creature and the creator it is misleading because it works with an inadequate doctrine of God.

Torrance is critical of the analogies from human love which universalists often employ. He believes that it is better to find our analogies in the biblical story, and in particular he selects the relationship between Jesus and Judas:

> The only valid analogy we have is in the life and death of Jesus Christ and there we learn where divine life was poured out to the utmost that men in unbelievable hardening of heart rejected it to the very last.

This shows that universalism 'commits the dogmatic fallacy of systematising the illogical. Sin has a fundamentally surd-like character' (1949:312, 313; cf Norment 1979:302). It is probably true that there is a surd element to human sinfulness but it is doubtful whether this should be taken as more significant for human destiny than God's love. The example of Judas shows how deeply God's love may be rejected but even Judas' betrayal must be set within the context of cross and resurrection. Torrance rejects any possibility of saving opportunities for the individual beyond death but if this life is only part of a much bigger history between God and ourselves then even Judas may come to embrace with love the Saviour of the world. It is certainly odd that with this as his decisive analogy Torrance seems to allow Judas' betrayal to count more than the empty tomb. In Christ's resurrection we glimpse the promise of the final undoing of the sin of the world. This is why 'in view of the cross of Christ, it is false and un-Christian to act as though hell was in fact the normal outcome of world history'. The preaching of the cross is not that of 'a mere possibility of salvation which exists as one possibility alongside the other of being damned'. The preaching of the cross and resurrection says that God

> does not merely leave the possibility of repentance and forgiveness in the realm of creaturely freedom, but in fact brings about this repentance (in and through human freedom)

> through the power of his love . . . The proclamation of the cross is the preaching of God's victory over guilt in and through our responsible freedom, not the moralistic preaching that our freedom is faced with two possibilities of which we have to choose one (Rahner and Weger, 1980b:121, 122).

It is significant that Torrance later says that 'God has actually chosen us in Jesus Christ in spite of our sin . . . in the death of Christ that election has become a fait accompli'. 'The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the final reality of our world upon which everything depends', such that '(e)ven when a man has made his bed in hell God's hand of love will continue to grasp him there' (1949:315, 316, 317). If Christ is the revelation of God even hell must be included within his love. This is common ground amongst both the advocates and opponents of universalism. It introduces a profoundly hopeful element into the Christian doctrine of hell since where God is there is still the application of his infinitely resourceful love. Because of this 'we must believe that God will never cease from his quest for universal reconciliation, and we can firmly hope for his victory in this quest' (Macquarrie, 1978b:367). Ward (1982a:148) speaks of all that even God can do perhaps being ultimately unable to save some from destruction, and C S Lewis pictured a situation in which those who dwell in the self-chosen limitless emptiness of the city of hell no longer want to be saved (cf Schmaus, 1977:258). The inhabitants of this city are taken from time to time to a plain from which they can glimpse the magnificent mountains of heaven in the distance. Although they are met by beseechers from heaven rarely does anyone leave hell behind. They have chosen a dark and unreal existence and cannot endure the immeasurably greater reality of heaven; the grass which the feet of the redeemed crush hurts the feet of these slight and shadowy creatures. Only once does someone face the truth and experience the devastating pain of God's judgement which nevertheless leads to the creation of something new and glorious (1946:89-95), and so hell has become purgatory. In this, admittedly unique, instance we see that hell has 'a school and a door in it' (Ferre, 1952:241) because it is always surrounded by God's saving love. Perhaps Ward and Lewis underestimate the significance of this. Hick tells us that:

> We have to suppose, not a human but a divine therapist, working not to a limited deadline but in unlimited time, with perfect knowledge, and ultimately controlling instead of

> being restricted by the environmental factors. In so far as we can conceive of this, do we not find that it authorizes an unambiguously good prognosis?

Even though we may wish to trap ourselves in our self-chosen turning from God the sheer resourcefulness and creativity of his love means that he can free us from this by making it possible again for us to make the response which we had become incapable of. It is this possibility which 'reflects the element of truth in the objective theories of the atonement' (1976:254, 253).

(c) The descent into hell

Several theologians have found great hope in the teaching about Christ's descent into hell. Difficult as this may be, there are few who would disagree with Rahner's assessment that it means there is 'no longer any abyss in human experience in which man is abandoned and alone' (1971b: 150). The descent into hell concerns the universal scope of salvation (Pannenberg, 1972b:95) and the infinite depths into which it reaches. It is therefore a most important statement about God and his determination to save the world, prompting Osthathios (1980:45) to say that 'the descent into Hades is not yet over and will continue till the last person is won back to Himself' (cf Harries, 1985:60). Perhaps the most interesting treatment of the descent into hell is that given by von Balthasar in his theology of Holy Saturday. This is of cardinal significance for his doctrine of God and 'gives us reason to hope that all human beings will be saved and none lost in the end despite the definitively intended No against God on the part of human being'. By entering into the finality of death the Son of God 'disturbs the absolute loneliness striven for by the sinner . . . who wants to be "damned" apart from God'. Because God enters into this in absolute weakness '(t)he freedom of the creature is respected, but it is retrieved by God at the end of the passion and seized again in its very foundations'. The love of God has recreated creaturely freedom in the very depths of its enslavement to sin and death. The triune God was prepared for this from all eternity. Our freedom has always been embraced by the freedom which the self-sacrificing love of God creates since

> . . . the world with all its destinies of freedom has been founded anticipatorily in the mystery of the sacrificed Son of God: this descent is a priori deeper than that to which one lost in the world can attain. Even what we call 'hell'

> is, although it is the place of desolation, always still a christological place (1983:45, 153, 422).

God is the one 'from whose creative love no destructive force is ever strong enough to withdraw us' (MacKinnon, 1978:135). As Maurice (1957:323) declared: 'I am obliged to believe in an abyss of love which is deeper than the abyss of death. I dare not lose faith in that love'. Therefore, 'the emphasis on the possibility of hell as perpetual obduracy must be paralleled by the insistent encouragement to rely with confidence on the infinite mercy of God' (Rahner, 1969a:8).

(d) 'All shall be well'

The Lady Julian was greatly puzzled about how 'all shall be well' given the great evil in the world. She took comfort in the fact that:

> There still remains a deed which the blessed Trinity will do at the Last Day . . . yet when and how it will be done is unknown to all God's creatures under Christ, and will remain so until it takes place . . .
>
> This great deed, ordained by the Lord God from before time, and treasured and hid within his blessed heart, is known only to himself. By it he will make everything to turn out well. For just as the blessed Trinity made everything out of nothing, in the same way shall he make all that is wrong to turn out for the best.

The mystery of the end is veiled from our sight just like the mystery of the beginning, and we should always 'leave on one side speculation as to the last great deed' (1966:109, 110, 112). Tyrrell (1983:390) rejected his opponents' charge of universalism by insisting that 'we cannot possibly tell how or in what sense "all shall be well"'. It is their dogmatism which insists that this must mean 'the final good of all the reprobate' but he prefers to wait for a better explanation. Julian shares this reverent agnosticism about the end. We cannot imagine how the love which creates everything out of nothing will finally recreate so that all shall be well. The parallel character of beginning and end means that what seems impossible for us is possible for God; perhaps this is the ex nihilo character of the end. At any rate 'no doctrine of love's final triumph can

be true to the love whose triumph it asserts unless it leaves room for final surprise' (Fison, 1954:132).

The doctrine of God seems to point most powerfully in the direction of universal salvation although this remains the subject of hope, prayer and action rather than something which can be known and counted upon in advance. Julian taught that God 'shall make well all that is not well'. 'She cannot affirm that "all that is not well" includes hell. But she arouses in us the hope that it can' (Harries, 1985:59).

iv Objections to the doctrine of hell

Walker notes that we can find evidence of the doctrine of hell being criticised, usually anonymously, in the 17th century, and that by the fourth decade of the 18th century the doctrine was being challenged openly. This marks a significant change in the tradition's attitude since such criticism 'is not true of the preceding centuries' (1964:3). Criticism has continued to the present day such that contemporary statements about hell are greatly removed from the awesome pictures of old. Pannenberg (1972b:91) speaks for most theologians today when he says that to know oneself near to God and yet excluded from his presence is the 'fundamental feature of the idea of hell . . . and the only one to which theology must hold fast and which it must free from the horrific fantasies of an imagination running riot'. Hanson writes that '(m)ost modern theologians would simply say that hell simply means separation from God. It is not a punishment which God arbitrarily inflicts; it is what we do to ourselves' (1969a:151; cf Macquarrie, 1978b:366). When he elsewhere writes that '(e)ternal punishment is totally incompatible with all we know about God as revealed in Christ' (1981:202) he hits upon the source of revision of the doctrine within Christian theology itself. Its traditional form is seen as incompatible with the Christian doctrine of God. This internal source of criticism has operated together with various external changes in societal notions of morality and in theories of crime and punishment.

(a) A growing catalogue of concerns

The doctrine of hell was able to retain what appears to us now as a very harsh and objectionable character for the first seventeen centuries of Christianity thanks to a number of factors. Walker mentions the support for the doctrine found in various authorities such as Scripture, the

Fathers, Church Councils and Protestant Confessions. The role of Scripture was paramount, the two crucial texts for the eternity of hell being Matthew 25 and Revelation 14 and 15 (the lake of fire and brimstone). This factor came to be of less significance with the decline in belief in scriptural authority in society at large, and within the Christian community has been subjected to criticism of the sort we have argued for in our discussion of Scripture and theology, although we should note that such internal theological criticism only becomes possible with the emergence of a different emphasis on the character of God. Actually of greater significance than its warrant in various authorities was the conviction that the doctrine of hell acted as a powerful deterrent against lawlessness in society, and it was partly to bolster this deterrent effect that there was a rigid insistence that the situation of any individual was determined at death with no further opportunities. The connection between the doctrine and morality was so strong in people's minds that it was difficult to raise a dissenting voice without bringing one's own integrity into question. However, this strength for so long began to be weakened when the deterrent value of the doctrine was called into question. Actual experience called the deterrent theory into question since it was apparent that atheists were not necessarily immoral; it was quite possible to be moral and not believe in eternal hell. Even those who did believe in the eternity of hell were not always suitably chastened in their actions. It was becoming obvious that the psychology of motivation was very much more complex than the deterrent theory supposed. In addition the disproportionate nature of the threat to the crime rendered the threat literally incredible, and this loss of credibility could only reduce the deterrent success. A lesser threat would be more effective (see Walker 1964:19, 23, 40-42). As belief in life after death came to be held with less certainty by fewer people this led to a further diminution of the credibility of the deterrence theory.

However, as Walker (1964:35) notes, '(m)ost of the graver weaknesses of Hell are connected with theodicy'. In particular, he mentions the problem of the high proportion of the damned to the saved, which was not helped by a high infant mortality rate boosting the numbers through infant damnation. The doctrine of hell has been subjected to change under the pressure of increasingly felt moral problems. The justice of eternal punishment and the black and white distinction between the damned and the blessed were particularly vulnerable tenets. The rather crude distinction between two groups of people simply did not seem to correspond to the reality of the human situation, which is more like one of continuously

varying degrees rather than a sharp fracture which marks a change in kind. Adams (1975:434) has investigated the doctrine of everlasting punishment at the point at which she thinks it is generally thought to be strongest, namely, 'that there are principles of justice that require a perfectly just God to condemn men who are sufficiently sinful to hell', and has found that such a concept is incompatible with God's perfect justice unless God be excused from the ordinary moral standards we expect to pertain in the consideration of such questions. The traditional insistence on the eternity of the punishment was connected very much with societal notions of crime and punishment which helped to form the doctrine of atonement (see Walker, 1964:26ff). Hence it was believed that an infinite atonement had to be made since the original offence was against God, and that such an infinite offence therefore deserved an infinite (ie eternal) punishment. Once it was seen that the seriousness of the offence was not so simply related to the dignity or societal status of the person offended, and that the same crime committed against people of different standing deserved the same response, this was bound to weaken further the case for eternal punishment. It was not only the growing societal realisation that justice hardly merited eternal punishment which brought this into disrepute, but also that notions of punishment were changing from what was often little better than a crudely vindictive purpose to a much stronger stress on reforming the offender. 'By 1880 the debate had quite clearly moved from . . . the teaching of Scripture to whether [hell was] morally defensible and consistent with contemporary ideas of progress and humanitarianism' (Rowell, 1974:152). An immutably fixed eternal hell could not fit into this new understanding of the function of punishment. Walker comments:

> Ethical torment is nowadays an unpopular doctrine among most kinds of Christians; the God of love has nearly driven out the God of vengeance; vindictive justice has had to take refuge among the advocates of hanging; and it is no longer considered respectable to enjoy the infliction of even the justest punishment. I am not asserting that we now behave or feel less cruelly, but only that we are more worried about the abominations we commit.

Nevertheless, although the eternity of hell was increasingly under attack from the 17th century onwards, even the 'merciful doctors' were only concerned to deny its eternity; they could still envisage the severest of punishments which were to last for several thousand years, which 'suggests

that among the many possible motives for wishing to eliminate the eternity of hell a revulsion from the thought of violent and prolonged suffering was not important (1964:262, 68). Here again the lingering remnants of the deterrent theory would have played a part. It was always believed that the pain of separation from God far outweighed any physical pain suffered in hell, and therefore one might stress to the uttermost the latter in order to impress upon the public imagination the former which was really the point of the message. This was a dubious tactic and it did become counter-productive. Thus we find that the need to re-interpret hell becomes increasingly obvious because the traditional form of the doctrine was actually creating severe pastoral difficulties and turning people away from Christianity (Rowell, 1974:139-52). It was this which played no small part in Maurice's decision to publish his famous essay 'On Eternal Life and Eternal Death' (1957) for which he was dismissed from his chair at King's College, London. Those who argue that modern understandings of the doctrine of hell, which lack the severity of past times, undermine the life of the church pastorally and evangelistically need to give more consideration to this feature of the history of the doctrine.

(b) Love and judgement

The greatest challenges to the eternity of hell, however, come from within Christian theology itelf, and in particular from the central Christian conviction that God is love. This is the driving force behind contemporary theologians' dissatisfaction with the older forms of the doctrine of hell, and Bligh (1971:9) speaks for many when he says that '(t)he doctrine of Eternal Damnation is a point of embarrassment to the contemporary Christian because it seems to conflict with his knowledge of God as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth'. Macquarrie (1978b:367) comments:

> Needless to say, we utterly reject the idea of a hell where God everlastingly punishes the wicked, without hope of deliverance. Even earthly penologists are more enlightened nowadays.

It is noteworthy that Macquarrie feels such a denial is self-evidently necessary in Christian theology and that this is so for him partly because God cannot be less enlightened than human administrators of justice and punishment. This again shows the pressure of changes within society upon

Christian theology's account of such matters. The emergence of love as the dominant criterion of God's action owes not a little to changing notions in society which helped to switch the focus of attention from justice to love, or better perhaps, brought the notion of justice within the limits set by the discussion of love. An increasingly sensitive society helped create a climate in which that most central of Christian convictions about God could come to the fore and exercise a critical influence on other tenets of the faith. But the very fact that the conviction that God is love is central means that there always was a latent point of criticism within Christianity itself of doctrines such as the eternity of hell. Thus we can find objections to this within the tradition long before human society could be considered in any way sensitive to the moral and ethical considerations which we now regard as most pressing in the realm of penal theory. The basic difficulty is that eternal punishment can only be retributive and as such must represent a denial and frustration of God's love. Robinson (1950:106) recognised this in his insistence that although judgement is absolutely necessary, as that through which we hear the word of divine mercy it cannot be God's last word. Similarly Ramsey (1969:223) argued that "eternal" 'is entirely misunderstood when it is translated descriptively as "everlasting"' since 'the whole purpose of this discourse about Hell is to reveal a loving and moral God which speaks to a man in his loneliness, despair and separation'.

Here we must bear in mind the very strong emphasis on renewal in the Old and New Testament pictures of judgement. Barth (1966:135, cf 136) therefore tells us that '(i)n the Biblical world of thought the judge is not primarily the one who rewards some and punishes the others; he is the man who creates order and restores what has been destroyed'. God's judgement is not the last word because it serves his loving purposes of mercy and renewal. His justice is satisfied when it creates out of a sinful situation a new situation of righteousness and peace. That is what matters to God and not merely retribution for its own sake. Anyone who truly looks to the cross for God will find only the self-effacing Lord who establishes his victory over evil for the sake of the world. The cross should certainly make clear that he who suffered there cannot derive any satisfaction from the suffering entailed in the eternity of hell. We cannot but think that in some writing about hell and God's relation to it there has been a simple but fatal failure to think about what the God who has revealed himself in the passion of Jesus might or might not do. A doctrine of the atonement which has not yet penetrated to the heart of God's passion for the world remains a pre-Christian statement of the

matter, and often provides us with confirmation of this judgement in the content of its eschatological teaching. Here we may think of theologies which pass all too easily from the atonement to affirming the eternal loss of those who fail to respond to the gospel. In such cases we must ask whether this has happened precisely because in the discussion of atonement there has been a failure to perceive what the atonement theory seeks to convey above all, namely God's love for the world. God's judgement and mercy belong together and they are both and everywhere an expression of his saving grace. We must ask ourselves whether the teaching of the church concerning justice and judgement and the eternity of hell has always made clear the heart of God's concern for justice as seen in Jesus, or whether this has sometimes been quite obscured.

Of course, it will be pointed out, and quite rightly so, that God's judgement is not tainted with all the weaknesses of human administration, and so should not be construed anthropomorphically. But theology must demonstrate that the judgements of God are not being conceived of in ways which fail to meet the standards of what is ethically and morally acceptable in human administration of justice. By introducing the divine forgiveness which makes anew, the gospel certainly goes much further than the ethical and moral but in being put into a larger context these are not set aside. We cannot escape from this without doing irreparable damage to theology and its proper concern with such matters. Thus Leibniz' theodicy rightly campaigned against what amounts to a Manichaean separation of divine from human moral values (Walker, 1964:53ff). The Christian God cannot and should not be loved unless he can be shown to be moral and loving by the standards which normally apply when deciding whether a man or woman is moral and loving. The conviction that God cannot be less moral and loving than we has had a powerful influence in reforming theological statements about hell and God's judgement.

In the light of this it is astounding to find statements like the following by Hoekema (1979:273):

> If we take the testimony of Scripture seriously . . . we are compelled to believe in the eternal punishment of the lost. To be sure, we shrink from this teaching with all that is within us, and do not dare to try visualize how this eternal punishment might be experienced by someone we know. But the Bible teaches it, and therefore we must accept it.

Such scriptural positivism is an evasion of theological responsibility which may, for reasons given earlier, be not so clearly biblical as Hoekema thinks. Schmaus (1977:258) furnishes us with an even more striking example when he writes:

> Regarding the eternal duration of hell, the objection could be raised that it is senseless if the ones undergoing this punishment are not able to reform themselves. But the meaning of hell does not lie in man's correction but in the revelation of God as holy, as Love, Truth, Justice, as absolute God'.

It is impossible to see how God reveals himself as Love in this way. These writers seem to talk far too easily of eternal punishment without adequate recognition of the difficulties which many other theologians feel this presents for belief in a God of love. There is no serious engagement with the objections which could be put to their position and they oversimplify the biblical teaching, in addition to assuming a biblicist understanding of the relationship between Scripture and theology. It may be doubted if any Christian case can be made for the doctrine of eternal punishment, but if one is to be made we must agree with Richardson (1950:107) that '(s)uch tentative answers as we may propose to these questions must not be based on a few texts but on the total revelation in Christ of God as holy love'. That is not to say that we can dispense with the doctrine of hell, for it may be that a more sophisticated and adequate account of it in terms of God's love can be given.

(c) The problem of ontological dualism

Another important theological problem which attends the doctrine of hell is the difficulty of giving an ontological account of hell, and the fact that the reality of hell would seem to involve a residual evil which results in an eternal eschatological dualism. Hell is often thought of as being the loss of God's presence, but we might well ask how this definition fits in with the conviction of God's omnipresence and the belief that without his sustaining presence life perishes. McIntyre (1962:230) argues that 'it is impossible to say that man ever wanders beyond the range of God, ever finds himself in a position to say that he is no longer involved with God'. We might well think that God's irrevocable commitment to humanity in the incarnation, death and bodily resurrection of Jesus

excludes such a possibility. The related point about the implied eschatological dualism is perhaps an even stronger one. Simon (1964: 205) vigorously rejects universalism but admits that '(t)he concept of Hell raises the greatest difficulty because the Christian Religion is not dualistic. Hell as an eternal realm of evil is unthinkable'. Berkhof (1979:531) thinks that a few passages in the New Testament do teach the eternity of hell, but he immediately adds:

> . . . there has always been a reluctance to engage in a deeper probing of this frightening conviction. For the implication is that one will have to assume that the absolute God-forsakenness forever retains a place in a renewed creation.

It is difficult to see how 'God will be all in all' (1 Corinthians 15.28) if this eternal frustration of his purposes takes place.

Augustine attempted to 'rebut the charge that unending torment involved the eternity of evil . . . by maintaining that, whereas unpunished sin was an evil, sin properly punished was a good' (Wenham, 1974:30). This was part of a view shared also by Aquinas and Peter of Lombardy which was a traditional strength until the 17th century. It was condemned by Dean Farrar in his 1877 Westminster Abbey sermons as 'an abominable fancy', namely, to think that:

> . . . part of the happiness of the blessed consists in contemplating the torments of the damned. This sight gives them joy because it is a manifestation of God's justice and hatred of sin, but chiefly because it provides a contrast which heightens their awareness of their own bliss (Walker, 1964:29).

This picture of the righteous rejoicing over the punishment of the damned without pity rightly appears to us as quite revolting and compares badly with Ferré's argument that:

> If eternal hell is real, love is eternally frustrated and heaven is a place of mourning and concern for the lost. Such joy and such grief cannot go together. There can be no psychiatric split personality for the real lovers of God and

> surely not for God Himself. That is the reason that heaven can be heaven only when it has emptied hell, as surely as love is love and God is God (1952:237).

The gospel had not yet broken through the contemporary societal notions about what was compatible with genuine humanity. The point that now seems obvious to most of us was not at all obvious then apparently, yet another example of the way in which Christian theology is influenced by its environment. Perhaps there is some limited value and validity in suggesting that 'God achieves his purposes through judgment and the lost testify to his goodness by revealing him as the source of all goodness from whom they have cut themselves' (Wright, 1967:37). If we are to affirm this possibility we must be careful to prevent some of the older more objectionable ideas creeping back in, and to stress the pain which God must suffer over the loss of those whom he loves, if indeed he does lose us. The major note of the gospel remains the hope that one day his love for us all will triumph in the freely accepted mercy of his judgement. In the words of a 19th century Nottingham Baptist minister

> We still believe in the sinfulness of man, especially our own sinfulness, but we believe that evil will finally be overcome by good. We still believe in the Atonement, that the forgiving and redeeming love of God is revealed in the life, death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we also believe in an Atonement of wider scope, that Christ will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied in a larger and diviner way than some of our theologians have supposed (Rowell, 1974:133).

Given the considerable difficulties which attend the traditional form of the doctrine of hell it is not surprising that some recent theologians have expressed sympathy for the idea of annihilation of the lost either at the point of death or after a suitable period of punishment. Thus the Hansons (1981:202) find it significant that:

> The most commonly used term for hell in the New Testament is apōleia, which means 'destruction'. This suggests that, if there are people who go on resisting God's love to the very end, their fate will be annihilation.

It is most interesting to find conservative evangelical scholars like Travis and Wenham being drawn in this direction. Wenham is so strongly attracted to the thought of annihilation after the just punishment that he wonders whether the shadow of the orthodox position has prevented this option from receiving the attention it deserves. He even says that 'a long tradition of belief within the Christian church is not decisive. Errors creep in and they die hard, especially when they have been elevated to the status of orthodoxy' (1974:39). Travis (1980:135) admits that '(t)he seemingly uncreative vindictiveness of eternal punishment, together with the eternal cosmic dualism which it necessitates, might tip the scale in favour of annihilation'. Wenham thinks that one advantage of this preference, if it is insisted that annihiliation takes place after the appropriate punishment, is that this ought to have a better deterrent effect, since it is more credible than the seemingly disproportionate threat of eternal punishment (cf Rowell, 1974:180ff). Marshall (1978:136) also insists that if we opt for annihilation of the wicked we must not forget that there is no biblical evidence that this takes place at the moment of physical death. There is the danger of a (doubtless unwitting) theological sadism creeping into the discussion when we feel we have to insist on punishment over and above annihilation. If the real loss or gain at stake in the New Testament is the knowledge of Christ himself, as Travis (1980:136) stresses, then we may have increased reason to be suspicious here.

It is not difficult to see the attractiveness of annihilationism over a belief in the eternity of hell in which people actively suffer. The former is certainly more acceptable and appropriate both morally and theologically. However, several writers express an unhappiness with the idea because they think that this eventuality is not the one which is most consonant with the character and nature of God as revealed in Jesus. Barclay (1967:238) writes:

> Now if God is love God cannot be at peace until the last child in his family has come home, and for God the obliteration and annihilation of the rebellious would be not triumph but tragedy, not victory but final and ultimate defeat.

Farmer (1948:144) agreed with this when he asked whether it could be anything other than a grievous defeat for God 'if vast numbers of persons are finally lost in some sort of Hell, or (as some have suggested), by

total annihilation' and Robinson (1950:123) remarked even more pointedly that there can be 'no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God'. It is true that Robinson is here thinking of hell, but there can be no doubt that he would want to express the same conviction in relation to annihilationism as a weaker form of the doctrine of hell. So also Macquarrie (1978b:361), after admitting that '(a) doctrine of conditional immortality is at least preferable to the barbarous doctrine of an eternal hell', goes on to say that 'perhaps the Christian hope can carry us further', because of its belief in God's ability to overcome the risks of the frustration of his love.

This section has shown how the doctrine of hell has come to be modified especially in relation to the Christian doctrine of God. It is belief in the love of God which creates the greatest difficulty for the doctrine of hell. Christian hope is convinced of the ultimate victory of God's love. This rules out the possibility of a final ontological dualism. In this way even hell cannot be a final state of affairs; it is surrounded by God's love and so remains a place of hope. This suggests that the notion of purgatory may well be very useful if it can be given a suitably evangelical interpretation. 'The darkness of rejection and God-forsakenness cannot and may not be argued away, but no more can and may it be eternalized. For God's sake we hope that hell will be a form of purification' (Berkhof, 1979, 532).

v Purgatory as the gift of God's unlimited grace

(a) The importance and possibilities of the concept

There are many theologians who deny the validity of the notion of purgatory. Richardson (1950:107) tells us that '(t)here is no support in the NT for rabbinic speculations (or later Christian ones) about Paradise as a place of purgation where souls are purified from sin and fitted for heaven'. Simon (1964:54-57) thinks that the idea of purgatory never really found a happy place in the tradition, and Travis (1980:131) argues that '(t)he idea of remedial punishment or of the steady transformation of persons after death is a guess which contradicts the general thrust of Scripture', adding for good measure that:

> . . . since a moment of conversion is a moment of fundamental and radical change which does not destroy the continuity of

> the person, it is no more difficult in principle to believe that at the moment of death or resurrection there takes place a moral transformation which is total and yet does not destroy the continuity of the person. By contrast, the argument for gradual purgation undermines the doctrine of God's grace.

These comments overlook the place which the idea of purgatory has in the tradition, and the possible reasons for this. Bastian (1967:1035) tells us that the Fathers generally affirmed the existence of purgatory and that prayers for the dead and other works were common practice. The Hansons (1981:203) make an interesting observation when they remark that experience makes talk of purgatory sensible since '(m)ost of us are not ready for heaven, if by heaven we mean the immediate presence of God'. It is significant that the early church taught that only the martyrs entered heaven directly upon death 'for the martyrs are those who have utterly transcended selfish being and attained a likeness to Christ' (Macquarrie, 1978b:366; cf Prusak 1974:486). We must grow in grace and for most of us that process is far from complete at the end of this life; if only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5,8) then we are not yet in a position to enter into that perfect state of fellowship with him. If we are to have 'the possibility of achieving an overwhelming good, then it is clear that there must be some form of life after earthly death' (Ward, 1982b:201). Ferre (1952:221) saw that 'all things cannot suddenly be made all right by the mere fact that people have died'. We may recall the sermon on death by Lampe (1981b) where he talks about the sense which he has near the end of his life that there is so much that he has only made a beginning to. Travis' argument above underestimates the extent to which conversion and grace are part of a long journey. Gradual progress does not undermine grace but is rather a statement of how in fact grace is experienced in the Christian community. It is therefore not difficult to understand Klinger's judgement that '(t)he doctrine of purgatory is an essential element in the belief of the Christian Church' (1970:167), even though it was only formulated dogmatically in the Middle Ages and was rejected by Luther, Melanchthon and the Confession of Augsburg from 1530 onwards.

Our argument has been that because God so loves us he will never cease to pursue us with his redeeming love. That is why we have not wanted to limit the history of God's struggle with us to this life alone. This is an attempt to be faithful to the revelation of God in Christ to which the Scriptures testify. For this reason one can claim that the idea of purgatory is a legitimate implication of the biblical doctrine of God, even

though we should acknowledge that the truth in Richardson's and Travis' argument is that Scripture does not contain the idea and places the stress on the moment of death. An appeal to the grace of God as seen in Christ opens the door to purgatory as a valid theological proposal.

However, another challenge which might be made is to point out that the use of purgatory in the case towards universalism is to give purgatory a role which it has never had. Wenham (1974:34) says of universalism that '(i)t is in effect a doctrine of purgatory, but a purgatory regarded as the destination not only of the baptized who die in venial sin (as taught in medieval theology), but of all those who die unfit for heaven'. We want to apply purgatory to all whereas in the tradition it applies only to those who at the point of death are already saved. 'In traditional Catholic theology purgatory does not provide a further opportunity for a fundamental turning to God; it is only for those who have already made their decision for God' (Hick, 1983:333). The justification for this universal application is simply that if God loves the world to the extent that he would appear to do in Christ's death, then he will not let anyone pass from his hands after the short span of this life but will continue to strive with us until his saving work is done. If we are to imagine that God's grace will continue to work on the Christian after death, as the tradition clearly does, then why should we be forbidden to think that this will be the case for those who are not yet Christians when they die? What reason do we have to believe that the effective sphere of God's grace is limited by death for one group of people and not another, and does this best correspond to the Christian doctrine of God? We have no warrant in either the concept of death or in that of God's love for this kind of distinction. It is for these reasons that the heading of this section describes purgatory as 'the gift of God's unlimited grace'. Rahner (1979:200) points the way towards these greater possibilities for the notion of purgatory:

> Indeed in certain cases the journey may not even be terminated by death. The traditional teaching about a 'place of purification' embraces a multitude of assumptions and modes of interpretation whose possibilities have by no means been exhausted and which can substantially alter the common popular notion of purgatory.

(b) The victory of grace

If what has been said thus far may be accepted then we may hope to give a theologically responsible account of purgatory, the primary feature of which will be the victory of God's grace. The rejection of the notion of purgatory by the Reformation is instructive in two senses here. First, Tillich (1978c:417) is surely right when he assesses this as follows:

> Protestantism abolished the doctrine of purgatory because of the severe abuses to which clerical greed and popular superstition subjected it. But Protestantism was not able to answer satisfactorily the problems which originally led to the symbol of purgatory.

Macquarrie (1978b:367) agrees with this verdict implicitly when he states:

> It is hard to understand why Protestant theologians have such a violent prejudice against this conception, for it seems to me to be indispensable to any reasonable understanding of Christian eschatology.

Second, Thielicke (1982:457), after acknowledging the problem of biblical support for the idea, thinks that:

> . . . some systematic considerations might suggest ways to give it a certain justification and to take from it the divisive quality that the Reformers found in it. This is possible, however, only on the one decisive condition that there be dissociated from purgatory the theory of penitential satisfaction which has always clung to it, especially in popular piety . . . The only valid sense in the idea of purgatory consists of the hope that the event of salvation does not end at death.

Similarly Marshall (1978:137), after noting that purgatory is unknown in the New Testament, raises the theological objection that 'such a suggestion would imply that salvation depends upon human acceptability to God rather than upon the finished work of Christ'. Let it be quite clear that if the doctrine of purgatory is to be theologically acceptable then it can only

mean that the redeeming work of God in Christ continues beyond death as a gift of his grace. It can only mean that he seeks to conform us to love so that we may enter into the fulness of the reality of heaven. Salvation is the final victory of grace, the achievement of Christlikeness.

Purgatory is to be thought of as the final stage in sanctification. It is therefore interesting to note in the 19th century a move back to the Patristic purificatory purgatory with its stress on the need for personal holiness for communion with God, and away from what Rowell (1974:105) calls the legal penal Roman understanding of the matter. Contemporary Roman Catholic theologians often hold this more evangelical understanding of purgatory, as when van der Walle (1984:209) writes that purification 'does not happen through compulsion or punishment but through the offer of grace, love, forgiveness and mercy'. Thielicke (1982:458) welcomes Ratzinger's christological interpretation of purgatory as a 'necessary process of change in which grace is not replaced by works (as the Reformers charged) but there is attained for the first time the full triumph of grace'. We must suffer the purifying fire of Christ himself, for as Macquarrie (1978b:368; cf Boros, 1970:58) tells us:

> The kind of 'suffering' envisaged in purgatory is not an external penalty that has to be paid, but is our suffering with Christ, our being crucified with him as we are conformed to him, the painful surrender of the ego-centered self that the God-centered self of love may take its place.

Von Balthasar (1983:421) sees purgatory as the achievement of 'complete selflessness, not in the loss of the I, but in its being penetrated by the radiance of the attitude of the divine triune process . . . perhaps in the . . . unfolding of scant initiatives in a life that has otherwise been completely egoistical'.

There are two other features of Macquarrie's account which are most instructive. First, he suggests something of how God is able to overcome sin and evil in his struggle with us beyond death.

> God is not changing the past by changing the facts that have happened (this is not possible even for him) but by bringing it into what I have called 'an ever wider reconciling context'. The supreme example of this is the cross of Christ which is turned from evil to good and finds its completion in the resurrection - and we remind ourselves that Easter is not

> a reversal of Good Friday but its conversion. This is God's reconciling work, and it reaches into all time, including the past which is still present to God. It is the costly atoning work of God, by which he draws out and absorbs and overcomes the poisons of history (1978a:120-121).

Second, he helps us to think in dynamic rather than static categories. Thus he writes that '(h)eaven, purgatory, and hell are not sharply separated, but form a kind of continuum through which the soul may move, perhaps from the near-annihilation of sin to the closest union with God'. This fits in with Macquarrie's contention that creation and reconciliation are continuous ongoing activities and so the consummation must be likewise thought of, such that all things are gathered up into God not in a static frozenness but in a stable dynamism in which new vistas continually open up (1978b:367, 356, 359). It is an understanding which corresponds to the biblical confluence of creation and salvation in both Old and New Testaments, and would seem to be dictated by our understanding of the persistent redemptive activity of God's grace. This grace of God towards us means that we need not be trapped hopelessly in our self-willed alienation, and that therefore hell may become purgatory and in due course lead us to heaven. That is the positive side of C S Lewis' The Great Divorce. Paternoster (1967:155) fully agrees with this when he tells us, with a clever twist, that '(h)ell is only possible because God is still interested in us; however we struggle he will not let us go. Hell at any time can be turned into purgatory if it is accepted and used'.

Conclusions

The total self-giving of God in Jesus Christ is the criterion of any Christian theology. If it is true that we may not count upon the salvation of all, it is even more the case that we must not rule out the hope that indeed all shall be saved. Those who look to the cross for their faith in God must never place any limit to the love of God and must always find in that the source of great hope for the world. This is why universalism can never be removed from the Christian hope (Rowell, 1974:220) Lossky (1957:235) tells us that:

> . . . the limits of the Church beyond death and the possibilities of salvation for those who have not known the light in this life, remain a mystery of the divine mercy for us, on which we dare not count, but to which we cannot place any human bounds.

Therefore it is a Christian duty to hope and to pray that in God's mercy all shall be saved. Thielicke (1982:456) wrestles with the question of universalism and comes to this conclusion:

> At this point (even in a systematic theology) I can only express a personal conviction. In my view there are some theological truths and circumstances - in this case the position of the lost - which cannot be the theme of theological statements but only of prayer. Nothing prevents people from praying that those who have rejected Christ will not themselves be rejected, that their history with God may continue in eternity, and that the boundlessness of eternal love will not stop at them.

Not to do so can only be a failure to appreciate what one does when one brings the words 'Christian' and 'hope' together. The hope of universal salvation remains a matter of hope. The end of all things is hidden from us and we cannot know just <u>how</u> all shall be well. 'No one is going to be dogmatic about this' (Barclay, 1967:238). Life is constituted in such a way that we must commit ourselves unreservedly to the mystery of God's ways. In this we should have no fear because in the light of the cross we can know all that we need:

> For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8.38-39).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Practice of Christian Hope: the Necessity and Shape of Christian Involvement in Society

Introduction

In 1978 Sir Edward Norman voiced a forceful protest against the politicisation of Christianity, by which he meant

> . . . the internal transformation of the faith itself, so that it comes to be defined in terms of political values - it becomes essentially concerned with social morality rather than with the ethereal qualities of immortality (1979:2).

Norman did not argue that there was no place for Christian involvement in politics and socio-economic change, but he offered little encouragement to those Christians who do feel that it is important to be involved in efforts to change the world when later he referred to 'the worthlessness of all earthly expectations' (1979:14) which he derived from Christian teaching about human fallibility. Moreover, his contrasting of 'the ethereal qualities of immortality', which he regards as the essence of Christianity, with 'social morality' can hardly have any other effect than to point the would-be Christian away from this world to another-worldly centre of attention. This chapter argues that Norman is quite simply wrong about the nature of Christianity.

That the world in which we live truly cries out for urgent and radical change so that all men and women may be given the opportunity to live happy and meaningful lives can scarcely be denied by any well-informed and caring human being. Publications such as the Brandt Report have made us aware that '(t)he problems of poverty and hunger are becoming more serious; there are already 800 million absolute poor and their numbers are rising' (1980:267). Poverty is not simply of the absolute variety of the world's poorest but also exists amongst the rich in the form of relative deprivation. There are reasons to believe that this relative deprivation is exacerbated by the way in which our society presently operates. Thus it can be argued that '(w)e constantly manufacture new forms of poverty as we drive forward the living standards of the majority without thinking what we are doing to those who cannot keep pace' (Donnison, 1982:226). The extent of this problem in modern Britain should not be underestimated. Townsend

(1983) has recently suggested that perhaps somewhere between 8% and 10% of the British population may be living in poverty, as defined in relation to eligibility for Supplementary Benefit, and Bosanquet tells us:

> From the late 1970s onwards the number of households in poverty by the conventional line of the Supplementary Benefit scale rate began to increase. This increase probably began before the Conservative Government took office in 1979 but accelerated under it. The number of people in households dependent on Supplementary Benefit or with incomes below the SB level was 6m in 1979. By 1982 the number had risen to 8m at a minimum (1983:184).

Small wonder than that the Bishop of Liverpool warned against the creation of an increasingly divided Britain in the Dimbleby Lecture for 1984 delivered on BBC television (Sheppard, 1984).

These few statistics from recent studies demonstrate the urgency of the present situation as one which requires the sustained application of human compassion. Moreover, the scale of the problems involved and their internationally complex nature means that individual efforts, although sometimes very valuable, will be insufficient. The structural problems which create poverty both within and between countries can only be dealt with by organised action both by government and non-governmental groups. It is for this reason that:

> Turning our backs on political issues and maintaining indifference to the unseen effects of our actions is not a legitimate option for a Christian, or anyone who takes morality seriously, in the circumstances in which we are placed (Dummett, 1979:22).

The point which we wish to make here is not simply that effective moral concern in the modern world must be political, but more fundamentally political theology's central insight that even if the church wishes to be apolitical that is not a possibility. All actions are political in some sense, and the demand that the church keep out of politics (Langdon, 1984) is guilty not only of uncritically sanctioning things as they are, but also of ignoring this basic sociological fact. We would do well to remember Barth's remark that 'wherever there is theological talk, it is always implicitly or explicitly political talk as well' (Busch, 1976:292). By being placed in society the church is inescapably political. She cannot and must not keep out of politics but must rather seek an appropriate role

in politics. Just what this might mean will concern us later.

The needs of the world raise the question: 'Does the Christian faith call us away from the world or does it push us into it?' (Berkouwer, 1977:189). If it is true that the Christian gospel does ask us to look away from the world to some other sphere as our real concern, then it would be very difficult to be a Christian. In fact, one would probably do better to give up one's Christianity and seek some other commitment which would foster more readily a caring and compassionate involvement with other human beings. Gladly I do not believe that we have to make such a choice when we find ourselves in the Christian church. This is quite simply because in Christian understanding God is not to be found in some other-worldly sphere, but in the midst of this world and its problems, which is and will always remain his world. The crosses which hang in our church buildings are reminders of Jesus who lived a human life which was one with the life of God. This world is very properly the focus of our concern as Christians because in Jesus God has made it the focus of his concern. The practice of Christian hope will lead us into the world precisely because it is Christian hope. This hope is hope in Christ who gave himself for the world and so it is quite impossible that it should lead us out of the world. We must begin by showing how this commitment to involvement in the world is implicit in Christian beliefs. We shall then discuss the sort of contribution the church might make to politics.

i Doctrines which drive one to politics

In using this general heading we are quite consciously borrowing the title which David Jenkins (1979) used in his essay on Norman's lectures. Christian beliefs call us to responsibility for what sort of world we and our fellow human beings are to live in, and once we embark on this task we shall find ourselves unavoidably caught up in the realm of the political. The political has a wide reference to any sort of organised activity which seeks to influence and shape the kind of society we live in. It is about how we foster and sustain at local and global levels a responsible, caring and just human society. This goes beyond a merely descriptive definition of politics of the sort that is commonly given in social science texts, such as 'the analysis of power relationships between different groups in society', but we believe the prescriptive definition points to the kind of politics Christian faith encourages us to seek. Christian responsibility

for what sort of world we live in is laid before us in the understanding involved in the following areas of doctrinal reflection.

(a) The crucifixion of Jesus

Moltmann has stressed boldly that the cross is the test of everything deserving the name Christian in his The Crucified God. He began this book with a first chapter devoted to what he called the identity-involvement dilemma facing the Christian today, namely the dilemma of either staying within the church but being irrelevant to the life of the world outside, or becoming involved socially and politically but losing one's Christian identity. Moltmann argued very creatively that it is the cross of Christ which gives Christianity its peculiar identity and with that, and not in opposition to that, its relevance for the contemporary world.

> Christian identity can be understood only as an act of identification with the crucified Christ, to the extent to which one has accepted the proclamation that in him God has identified himself with the godless and those abandoned by God, to whom one belongs oneself (1974b:19).

One of the most important of the many contributions which Moltmann has made to a Christian theology of the cross is his stress on the passion of God which both lies behind and is enacted at Golgotha. He makes clever use of the double meaning of the word passion, which relates to the suffering and enduring of the cross and 'the passionate devotion of Christ which brought him into this suffering' (1977a:3). This is important for our present theme because Christian involvement in the world must seek to be grounded in and motivated by this deep and passionate love which God himself has for the world, and the church must seek to be a sign and embodiment of that love in the world. Moltmann tells us that truly '(h)uman life is lived to the extent that it is loved and affirmed' and if this is the case then it is of the utmost importance that we 'learn a passion for life again, from the passion of God himself' (1977a:8, 6).

The death of Jesus must concern us here when we consider the inescapably political nature of his crucifixion. Crucifixion was a religious-political punishment used to preserve and defend the Pax Romana in a situation in which it would be inappropriate to draw strict divisions between the religious and the political (Hengel 1977b:39, 46). Thus Davies (1976:17) is right to complain that any attempt to privatise Christianity

is 'to forget that the death of Jesus had political causes and also had political consequences', and Rahner says something similar:

> Even the Cross should not be interpreted in a private sense. The death of Christ is certainly not the death of a social revolutionary . . . however, this death of his did take place in the social and public life of Israel, and in a hostile confrontation with the social forces and institutions then prevailing. It was no merely private fate which befell him but a public one, a political event, if we like to express it in these terms (1974d:241).

The realisation that Jesus himself suffered death at the hands of an oppressive political power ought to be the occasion for serious reflection about our responsibilities as Christians towards those who suffer likewise in the various 'Golgothas' of the present. Hengel makes this connection quite explicitly when he argues that 'the earliest Christian message of the crucified messiah demonstrated the "solidarity" of the love of God with the unspeakable suffering of those who were tortured and put to death by human cruelty' in a 'passion story' of suffering which continues down to the present day (1977b:88). When the cross is seen in this context it is not difficult to understand Alves' remark that the cross does not simply stand for the tragedy of death or human finitude, but rather here such categories 'are set in the historical context of the politics that defuturizes man' (1975:113).

It is in this connection that Metz has made his most valuable contribution to political theology. Charles Davis, having indicated that the first task of political theology was to arrive at a new understanding of the task and method of theology by means of the unity of theory and practice, identifies the second task as that of establishing 'the specifically Christian and theological character of political theology'. He follows this immediately with a new paragraph which begins: 'Metz himself has drawn his political theology back within the traditional Christian orbit by formulating what is briefly called his "Memoria-thesis"' (1980:7). In 1972, in various places, Metz published an article entitled 'The Future Ex Memoria Passionis' as an exercise in social theory and a thesis on memory, in which he talked of the 'dangerous memories' of past suffering which challenge us to create a new future of freedom. This allows Metz to give the remembrance of Christ a central place in political theology:

> Christian faith articulates itself as memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi. At the center of this faith stands the memory of the crucified Lord, a particular memoria passionis on which is grounded the promise of future freedom for all (1972:127).

Thus political theology 'wants to understand and introduce the Gospel into contemporary society and its "systems" as a dangerous, liberating and redeeming memoria Christi' (Puthiadam, 1972:458). We must think of the eucharistic anamnesis 'as the focus of a spirituality of liberation' (Hellwig, 1975:259). The cross teaches us that '(s)uffering is the mother of hope' (Alves, 1975:120).

That there is a divine reversal involved in the death and resurrection of Jesus has been recognised by several theologians when contemplating the significance for political power of the fact that he who suffered at its hands has been raised from death and exalted by God. At the very least we must say that the exercise of political power must be subject to constant review and criticism since 'the cross of Jesus demonstrates the tendency of political rule to violate the majesty of God, a tendency which operates everywhere where political rule usurps absolute binding force'. This does not mean that all political power is rendered illegitimate by the cross, as Pannenberg is quick to stress:

> But political rule is not merely condemned, either. It is certainly humbled by the higher authority of God, who turned its judgment upside down by raising the crucified Jesus; but it is also pardoned on condition that it accepts this humiliation (1972b:85-86).

Much later on in this chapter we shall have to return to the question of the use of power and the significance of the cross.

The central event of the Christian story, namely the death of Jesus, does call us to think about politics by its very nature, and it reminds us that we cannot run away from the reality of politics, power and conflict.

(b) The Christian doctrine of God

The peculiarly Christian understanding of God is found in the doctrine of the Trinity, and this doctrine points us to the presence of Jesus Christ in the world in obedience to his Father and in the power of the Spirit.

Trinitarian faith finds in Jesus the human embodiment of God. The Christian confession of the bodily resurrection of Jesus means that human life has permanently entered into the life of God in Jesus and is constitutive of the triune being since the incarnation. A human life has become the centre and focus of the triune life of mutual and outgoing love, and the divine life itself was raised to a new height of self-giving love in the triune work of passion of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the light of this incarnational and trinitarian 'involvement of God in materiality and history for the sake of man, one must face a new and clearly articulated truth claim about the underlying structure of the relationship between God, man and the world' (Jenkins, 1967:49).

Thus Bonhoeffer wrote that '(w)hoever sees Jesus Christ does indeed see God and the world in one. He can henceforward no longer see God without the world or the world without God' (1955:51). Barth expressed himself similarly:

> First and supremely it is God who exists for the world. And since the community of Jesus Christ exists first and supremely for God, it has no option but in its own manner and place to exist for the world. How else could it exist for God? The centre around which it moves eccentrically is not, then, simply the world as such, but the world for which God is.

Therefore the church is 'essentially and per definitionem summoned and impelled to exist for God and therefore for the world and men'. She can only exist in the 'most genuine attachment' to the world which excludes 'any possible quietism' (1962:762, 763, 776, 777). Barth's theology of socio-political reality was based on the doctrines of reconciliation and eschatology, Christ being the Lord not simply of the church but of the whole world since in Christ God reconciled the world to himself. It is the link with Christology which means that 'social concerns stand not at the periphery of Christianity but are tied to its center, ie Jesus Christ' (Butler, 1974:444, 445). This recognition that the saving and reconciling Lordship of the Christian God is directed towards the whole world means that '(f)aith in God which does not reach out to believe and hope for the world undermines its own foundation' (Willmer 1979a:127).

The Christian doctrines of creation and incarnation forbid us to show any kind of contempt for existence in this world, and press upon us the importance of the political:

> . . . the Lord of creation has revealed himself as an incarnate God, and this belief cannot be reconciled with indifference to or contempt for the material body. Christians have to be concerned with the physical since Christ himself was the Word made flesh. But to be concerned with the physical in this day and age is to be engaged in the political and economic spheres which directly affect people as psycho-somatic beings (Davies, 1976:38).

In light of the taking of human life by God in Jesus as his very own, any attempt to 'spiritualize the gospel away from real earthly human life' can only be viewed as a modern form of the docetic heresy (Gladwin, 1979:101). To put matters more positively, what we find in the doctrine of the incarnation is the most positive affirmation one could possibly find of the importance of created existence, and in particular the highest possible raising of the dignity of human life since it has become through Jesus an expression of the eternal life of the Son of God. Just as Moltmann (1974b:5) has written of the need to strengthen the power of resistance of the Christian hope through the cross, so it is important to realise that a failure to take belief in the incarnation and resurrection of the body with total conviction may leave us powerless in the face of some of the world's most ugly problems. Adrian Hastings has expressed this most forcefully and eloquently in the following passage:

> True Christian moral commitment is a passionate concern with the particular and the material. Its grounding is in the particularity, the historicity, the materiality of Incarnation, Resurrection and Eucharist. The spiritualists and the demythologizers, for all their sincerity and all their devotion, hold to a different Christ and a different Gospel. Their spiritual resurrections and communions have no power to overturn the world of flesh, the segregation of race, the torture of the body. It is the risen flesh of the Incarnate Lord sacramentally present in the Eucharist which transforms a spiritual philosophy into a revolutionary creed (1975:164).

For a Christian the very business of human living, and especially the conflicts and struggles where the reality of God is at stake, can be made the means whereby one grows into union with God. 'In human love there is a

depth which man does not expect: it is through it that man encounters God' (Gutierrez, 1974:238).

Leech, following Verghese, identifies five distortions or pathological features of Western theology which have emerged again in more recent trends, the second of these being a flight from the world and the collapse of Christian materialism, and in this context he comments that '(t)he essential materialism of orthodox Christian theology gives way to E R Norman's concern with the "ethereal qualities of immortality"' (Leech 1981:130; Verghese, 1972). Mascall criticises the Reith lectures of 1978 for 'a complete neglect . . . of the fact that there is a tradition of social and political thinking within Christian theology' and an Anglican social tradition which 'is very much concerned with the social implications of traditional Christian dogma' (1982:3). More fundamentally he criticises Norman for stating that in the incarnation the 'visible and unseen world were briefly joined' (1982:6). This is surely the source in his doctrine of God of Norman's misunderstanding of the nature of Christianity, however accurate or otherwise his historical assessment of contemporary Christianity may be. This example shows the need to return to distinctively Christian, ie trinitarian and incarnational, thinking about God, humanity and the world.

The most basic reason for Christian seriousness about the world is that the world is the world which was made by God - the world into which the Son of God came and for which he gave himself and the world whose end is promised and shall one day be made manifest in Christ. The passion of God for the material world which he has made and will not let go of must also be ours. When we have said this we may have not yet penetrated through to the truly radical understanding which Christian theology gives of the intimate relation between creator and creation when we take the life and passion of Jesus as being truly the life and passion of God himself. Moltmann claims that when thinking about the cross we need to go beyond the limits of the doctrine of salvation and inquire about 'the revolution needed in the concept of God. Who is God in the cross of the Christ who is abandoned by God?' (1974b:4). This led Moltmann to criticise the old notion of the apatheia of God, and to talk of the suffering of the crucified God in trinitarian terms which makes such talk possible for the first time. The incarnation must not be thought of simply as a work of the triune God ad extra, but is before that, and as a condition of that, a work ad intra. Moltmann brings God and history together within the trinitarian history of God (1974b:274-78; 1975b; 1981:126-28). His stress on the trinitarian history of God suggests that God finds himself in the world.

God has committed himself to the creation in such a way that his own being as Lord is at stake in what happens in history and at the end of history. He shall be fully what he intends to be only when all his purposes for creation come to pass. Moreover, if it is true that God is a triunity of love, then must we not say that on the cross the self-giving of the three divine persons reached a new and unsurpassable height? If God is love then does this not mean that on the cross God's own being was 'enlarged' through the exercise of love which the passion of Christ called forth? We may feel uneasy about such statements but we ought at least to ask ourselves whether or not such uneasiness is really only a longing for Moltmann's apathetic God, and a running away from the scandalous truth of the incarnation and the implications it has for all our thinking about God. Perhaps there is an ever present temptation to soften the still offensive claim that in the human life of Jesus we really and truly encounter the life of the Son of God, by going back to a doctrine of God which has yet to be fashioned after the historical contingency and fleshly materiality of the incarnation.

Through the incarnation human life has entered the life of God himself irrevocably and so has become constitutive of the triune relations of love through the human life of Jesus. God can no more turn his back on creation than he can dissolve his own being by discarding the humanity of the risen Jesus. It is the Father's intention to bring all creation back to himself through his Son. Only when all things have been received into the divine fellowship of the Trinity shall the triune life of God himself reach its intended consummation. That is how seriously God takes the world, and how seriously therefore Christian theology ought also to take it.

(c) The theological notion of the human person

The previous section has prepared the way for much of what needs to be said here. We pointed out that the incarnational assumption of our humanity in Jesus gives to human life the greatest possible dignity and shows just how much God values the human because he himself chooses to be a man amongst us. In Christian terms the human person must always be thought of as the brother or sister for whom Christ died, and who therefore already lies 'within the great mantle which God's poured out-love has thrown around all' (von Balthasar, 1983:203). In the light of Christ's resurrection from the dead and bodily ascension into heaven, we must say that the human person is destined for full communion with God. Christ's teaching prompts us to believe that God is encountered and ministered unto in the needy person in whom Christ himself is present in a hidden fashion (Matthew

22.34-40 and 25.31-46; Gutierrez 1974:295). Indeed the human person is to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6.19).

In the cross of Christ God shows himself to be love, and when we say that each person is created in the image of God we ought to include as of crucial importance here the thought that each is a creature of love and finds his or her true self in loving and being loved. It has been said that 'the new dimensions and the meaning that Christianity has given to love constitute the most fruitful contribution ever made to man's continuing creation of himself' (Garaudy, 1967:214). This remark must be seen in terms of the possibilities of human self-transcendence opened to us through the cross and the trinitarian notion of the human person. In an essay on 'The Theological Notion of the Human Person' Lossky asks 'whether Trinitarian theology has had any repercussion on Christian anthropology - whether it has opened up a new dimension of the "personal"' (1974:115). Although he does not develop the matter in this way we shall argue later that the doctrine of the Trinity suggests that a Christian anthropology must preserve the importance of the individual who nevertheless finds his or her true self and expression only when we learn to live in community. William Temple (1976), though not arguing from the Trinity, recognised this when he advocated the principles of freedom, social fellowship and service. The fact that Christianity preserves and protects the private core of the individual is of the utmost importance according to Davis, and it is perhaps salutary that he questions whether political theology can protect the 'continued survival of the individual in society . . . if the human subject has no transcendent and indefeasibly private core' (1980:180). He obviously fears that it does not have the theoretical framework - presumably he means by this the transcendence of God - necessary for such a task.

Christian anthropology must be set within the fundamentally hopeful context of God's saving love. It is therefore most unfortunate that Christian thinking about social involvement to improve the world has too often been crippled by an unduly pessimistic assessment of the human. We found an example of this in Norman's conviction of the 'worthlessness of all earthly expectations'. Excessive pessimism is more likely to be found in the Western tradition of Christianity. Thus Ware speaks of the Orthodox rejection of Calvin's teaching that 'man after the fall was utterly depraved and incapable of good desires', in preference for the view that 'because he still retains the image of God, man still retains free will, although sin restricts its scope' (1980:228, 229). This seems to be a much more satisfactory statement of the matter in terms of how we experience our

own behaviour and that of others. It is of very considerable importance that we work within the much more positive Eastern understanding than within the negative Western stress for the latter at best can only lead to an extreme curtailment of the possibilities for good to the redeemed community - and quite possibly there only in a severely restricted fashion - or at worst a complete paralysis. As Margaret Kane says:

> The Western church has for many years put all the weight on man as sinner. Its theology underplays man, his dignity and his freedom. We need to learn again from the Eastern church that the most fundamental thing about man is not that he is sinner but that he is in the image of God. Our whole understanding of what we may expect from life depends on getting this right (1980:95).

This is not to deny the universal presence of sin in human life in a naively optimistic view of humanity. Even a very small amount of contact with reality would quickly dispose of any facile optimism. But we do insist that the fact of human sinfulness is not the most important truth about humanity. When we speak of the human condition in the light of the gospel the most important thing to say is that as sinners we are saved by the grace of Christ. Only when it is understood that this is more than anything else what Christianity has to say about humanity will it be possible to recognise the tremendously positive possibilities which Christian faith presents to us, and why the gospel is still good news in the modern world. The essence of Christianity is a religion of redemption and '(a) form of Christianity from which the proclamation of the fact and possibility of man's redemption had been evacuated is unthinkable' (Lash, 1981:146). In this connection, and in the light of our foregoing remarks about the difference between Eastern and Western views of sin, it is interesting that Lehmann should comment that 'Protestant theology has never sufficiently regarded the world in the light of the victory of Christ' (1963:115).

It is the cross which leads the Christian faith to speak of hope and to believe that such hope is not merely pious fancy or an easy optimism which has not yet come to terms with the depths of evil in the world. In fact, the Christian may want to claim that it is the person who looks to the cross who alone appreciates the full extent of evil in the world and its radical depth, and yet because it is the cross to which we look we will not thereby be overwhelmed by what is perceived to be true of the human

condition perhaps for the very first time. Hans Urs von Balthasar states that Christians have no easy answers to the world's problems but significantly he adds that 'from their knowledge of God's involvement for the world, they have a wider horizon which embraces the problematic and tragic, without eliminating it, and from which there falls on the world the only light that is truly illuminating and helpful' (1983:371). The hope which stems from the cross avoids both optimism and pessimism and lives in the tension which is basic to the gospel of crucifixion and resurrection, 'the tension between what life is and what in God's grace life can be' (Kane, 1980:84). Therefore as Ricoeur says, 'the first sign of Christian hope is to believe that something can always be done in every situation' (1958:269). In a world which can so readily bring forth resignation, cynicism and despair, it is noteworthy that we have been able to finish this section on such a fundamentally hopeful note, precisely because of, and certainly not in spite of, the 'image of the human' (von Balthasar, 1983:370) with which Christian faith sends us into the world.

(d) Sacramentalism and realism

Incarnation and resurrection abolish all possible dualisms between matter and spirit. The Easter gospel stands for the fact that grace is incarnate and is mediated through human relationships and actions and the fabric of life. Sacramental practice and historical action embody this understanding of grace. The fact that grace is incarnate means that the saving grace brought to the world in Christ and lodged at the centre of the world's sinfulness in his passion has to be made effective again and again in each historical situation. This points to the materialist and realist nature of Christian faith as opposed to idealism. It is of very considerable practical importance that this be understood, but unfortunately it has not always been so in the history of Christianity. Thus Lash argues that the debate between idealism and materialism is not a debate between Marxism and Christianity but is already a debate within Christian theology. He is critical of the tendency sometimes found in Christianity 'to substitute a theory of reconciliation . . . for its practice'. 'For the Christian, the 'work of our redemption' refers not merely to a deed once done, or to the substance of hope for the future, but also to tasks to be performed, in hope, in virtue of that deed' (1981:193, 257). The refusal to substitute theory for practice, idealism for historical action, suggests a perhaps surprising area of agreement between Christianity and Marxism. If grace is to be embodied in such action salvation and politics can be expected to

overlap. Christian materialism requires a serious engagement with politics.

(e) Christian eschatology

To try to derive the importance of Christian involvement in society from Christian teaching about the last things may seem rather odd given the way in which the Christian belief in life after death is often supposed to divert attention from this world to another as the real focus of our concern. This view lies behind a Marxist's question to a conference of theologians, and Pannenberg in particular: 'Is Christian hope something to be, through faith, awaited, or something through which men and women in their efforts now have a part to play?' (Klugmann, 1970:67). We shall now argue that a proper understanding of Christian belief in life after death does not distract from the concerns of this life.

William Temple taught that 'the key Christian doctrines link together, so that it is possible to reach a positive attitude to this world from all of them - creation, atonement, the church, the sacraments, the last things . . . - and not merely from the incarnation' (Preston, 1981d:79). This linkage between different Christian doctrines, or what we might call the internal logic of Christian theology, such that Christian teaching forms a coherent and internally consistent whole, is most important. In all of this the incarnation is central and must be allowed to determine how we think of God, human existence and the world. Any attempt to divide eschatology from action in the present simply misunderstands the significance of christology for both. Kaesemann puts this in characteristically blunt fashion:

> An idealistic Christianity which is only concerned for the soul and for eternal life is a mockery of the man who went from the stable to the gallows, aroused the anger of the religious people of his time against himself and spent his life not exclusively but at least recurringly, in bad company' (1978b:16).

The conviction that God has bound himself to human life irrevocably in Jesus and is present and active everywhere and throughout history to bring all things to their true end in himself ought to cause us to believe that there is a fundamental continuity between this life and world and the consummation. With the coming of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit the

eternal life of God himself has already been planted firmly in the midst of human relations which can now anticipate the life of heaven. The consummation is a consummation because it is a consummation of this life and world. This Gutierrez is exactly correct when he says that we look to this world and see 'in the world beyond not the "true life" but rather the transformation and fulfillment of the present life' (1974:152). If one believes that God wishes to save us and by that one understands that he wishes to bring us to truly human living in relation to himself and our fellow human beings, then the following words from Wainwright take on a rather obvious and compelling nature for us:

> . . . there is a teleologically positive correspondence between human welfare on earth and final salvation in heaven, between the historical future and the eschatological kingdom. In God's intention, the values of the kingdom are already seeking penultimate embodiment in forms appropriate to our present existence.

And again when he writes:

> And the Christian hope is that God in his grace will continue to give signs of his saving presence and purpose in this or another part of humanity, and that whatever has been achieved of value will be taken up into his definitive kingdom (1980:427, 398).

We must think of the way to the ultimate as being through the penultimate, which is to say 'through the common or garden stuff of our daily lives set within the context of the world of politics' (Davies, 1976:21). It is in an essentially similar vein that Meyendorff tells us, with typically Orthodox synergism, that '(t)he "New Jerusalem" is not only a free gift of God coming from heaven, but also the seal and the fulfillment of all the legitimate efforts and aspirations of mankind, transfigured and transformed into a new creation', and that '(n)o eschatology will be faithful to the Christian message unless it maintains both the power of God over history and the task of man, which resides in the very real freedom which was restored to him in Jesus Christ for the building of the Kingdom of God (1979:120, 121). All this serves to drive home our basic point that when Christian eschatology is understood properly, in accordance with Christ's incarnation, this makes involvement in the world more and not less

important than it would be otherwise, precisely because we have reason to believe that its achievements are not merely temporary moments in the passing of time, but will find an ultimate vindication and fulfilment in the eternal life of the promised consummation.

Moltmann (1968d) has written of the need to bring out the political relevance of eschatology in 'messianic hope'. Likewise, Metz speaks of 'that "humanism of creative hope" which I think should be Christian theology's contribution to humanism' and of the need for a '"creative eschatology", which implies a kind of "political theology"'.

> Christian eschatology is not just passive expectation, regarding the world and time as a prefabricated waiting room in which man must sit about uninvolved and bored - the more hope, the greater boredom - until the door opens to the divine audience chamber . . . Eschatological faith and earthly initiative go hand in hand (Metz, 1966:283, 285, 286; cf Moltmann 1968d).

ii The relation between theology and politics

The relationship between theology and politics is a complex one which does not run simply in one direction, and about which theologians are not in agreement. We shall begin by looking at two contrasting approaches, before proceeding to more detailed analysis of some of the problems involved in the relationship.

(a) Political theology and a theology of politics

Political theology draws our attention to the political character of all theology. Preston puts the point nicely:

> My own view is that the basic point of political theology is the realization that theological thought is inescapably political, in that it does not take place in an intellectual vacuum of pure, disinterested, reasoning but in a political context in which social, economic and cultural factors are powerful in conditioning that thought. It is the development of the sociology of knowledge which has brought this home to us (1981h:84).

Political theology seeks to be critically aware of the way in which theology influences and is influenced by the society in which the theologian is placed. In particular, it seeks to take up Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach which reads: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it' (Colletti, 1975:423). It is in this sense that Metz tells us that the current worldview directed to the future is primarily operative not contemplative, and that orthodoxy must be authenticated by orthopraxy (1966:280, 286). Davis, commenting upon Metz, states that '(p)olitical theology as understood here is . . . a new way of doing theology . . . It is not a part of theology, but theology in its entirety done politically' (1980:3). An awareness of the political nature of all theology means that the first task of political theology is to reverse the privatising tendency in post-Enlightenment theology which fails to apprehend the situation of the individual adequately by abstracting him from his existence which is 'to a very great extent entangled in the vicissitudes of society' (1970:140). Barth too 'lamented the constricting attention Christians had paid to the individual life of faith, making Christianity into nothing more than a private matter' (Bentley, 1973:353). This basic point of political theology has gained widespread acceptance (eg Rahner 1974d:237; Macquarrie, 1978b:517; Gilkey, 1979:155).

Metz argues for the impossibility of this privatised religion in the light of the eschatological promises of the biblical tradition, since these promises of freedom, peace, justice and reconciliation 'constantly force themselves into the world of social responsibility'. 'Therefore, every eschatological theology must become a political theology in the sense of a theology of social criticism' (1968a:6). Moltmann argues that far from politicising the faith, political theology seeks to make it more truly Christian. Faith, he says, 'gains substance in its political incarnations and overcomes its un-Christian abstraction, which keeps it far from the present situation of the crucified God' (1974b:318). Political theology therefore seeks to make the practice of Christian faith more concretely relevant whilst not losing its Christian character. The social criticism of political theology includes both church and society. Criticism of society is in fact already included in the church's self-criticism, the church being no abstract entity but the church which is involved in the world and finds its identity therein (Rahner, 1974d:232). We have already spoken of Metz's thesis about dangerous memories and it is this which Puthiadam has in mind when he remarks that '(f)aith is dead, is empty, when what it recalls no longer has any innate dangerousness for society and for the Church herself' (1972:458).

We have been considering some of the more important features of political theology, and we saw that one of these was the denial that politics is just one concern amongst many for theology: all theology is political. An article by Butler seeks to distinguish the approach of political theology from that of a theology of politics. He turns to the writings of Moltmann, Metz and Herzog in order to find a working definition of political theology. Herzog makes a distinction between a hermeneutical norm and a hermeneutical focus:

> A hermeneutical norm is a theological norm. It is the basic principle(s) which organises and directs a given theology. It is the principle by which the theologian seeks to interpret the various doctrines of theology as well as the Bible. As such, the hermeneutical norm is the theologian's prime interpretive tool. A hermeneutical focus is the situation to which the theologian wishes to speak. A hermeneutical focus does not organise a theology or serve as a basic principle of a theology. The task of a focus is more modest. When a theologian determines a hermeneutical focus, he seeks to identify the situation, process, community, etc, to which he will speak.

By introducing this distinction Butler can return to his original question about whether or not Barth sought a political theology or a theology of politics, and when we apply Herzog's terminology to Barth we can see that for Barth the focus is the church as threatened by heresy and the norm is Jesus Christ as the Word of God. It would be quite wrong to think of Barth as a political theologian since '(t)he distinguishing characteristic of political theology is that socio-political reality is given a hermeneutical status. This is something that Barth steadfastly and continually refused to do' (1974:456, 457, 458).

This brings us back to the claim made by the political theologians that <u>all</u> theology is political. One cannot help but feel that Hodgson is correct when he asks Metz whether political theology has become for him not simply a corrective but the <u>whole</u> task of theology, pointing out that:

> There seems to be room for little else in Metz's theological house . . . Is ecclesia fundamentally or constitutively a political community? Are not its structures and relationships defined by something that transcends and transfigures

> politics? . . . Political theology rightly articulates the dialectic of the individual and society, but it cannot claim to be the only theology that does so (1981:32).

If this is what Metz has done then he needs to be reminded, in the words of one Latin American writer, that 'i(t) would be an exaggeration to maintain that all theology, insofar as it is intellectual reflection on Christian faith and action, must be specifically political theology based on eschatology, the future, and hope' (Ellacuria, 1979:596). Preston (1981h:85) has made the important observation that the root question which political theology raises is how to do theology and it is at this point that it would seem to combine genuine and valuable insight with what appears to be a grossly exaggerated claim. While we do need to be aware of the danger of privatisation and do need to ask who does theology, and also need to be aware of the ways in which major doctrinal convictions imply significance for our Christian involvement in the world, we also ought to recognise that not every area of discussion within theology has to be harnessed to serve the political task, and that there are quite legitimate areas of discussion within theology which do not impinge upon the political, or do so only in the most indirect and tangential fashion. Thus, for example, one might think of the study of the liturgy as being a perfectly legitimate theological enquiry, but in studying this one should not allow the agenda to be dominated by political questions, and it will be the case that any political significance to be derived from this will come only very indirectly, perhaps as we reflect upon the central theological convictions enshrined therein. We may well ask the political theologian, who wishes to make the entire theological agenda serve political change 'what account can he give of the experience of those who live and die outside the scope of the political and social change which he rightly stresses? What is "hope" for them?' (Travis, 1980:94). We may readily accept the descriptive points of political theology as an extension of the sociology of knowledge, but we cannot accept the prescriptive proposal which political theology seems to want to make, namely, that all theological activity must and should be directed to political change.

Closely related to our concern here with the prescriptive nature of political theology is its frequent acceptance of Marxist presuppositions. Davis (1980) questions how easily this can be reconciled with the Christian tradition, not least with belief in God, and the use of Marxist categories, methods and aims (even if in a qualified fashion) does lend support to the charge that political theology is guilty of politicisation because it moves

between theological convictions and political programmes and objectives too simply and directly. Such criticism of political theology amounts to the suspicion that political theology is theologically weak, paying insufficient attention to the way in which theology has been carried out traditionally and lacking a sufficiently sympathetic understanding of this, and being guilty of moving somewhat naively between the theological and political, if not actually reducing the theological to the political. This suspicion gains strength when we find Davis complaining that:

> The constant appeal to practice in recent theology is just an excuse for a lack of theory. The idea of spontaneous orthopraxis is a myth. Recourse is had to ethical inspiration to cover over the absence of theoretical criteria for action (1980:61).

Theory and practice need each other, and the assertion of the primacy of practice over theory may be a dangerous thing if the reflection which might correct and improve the practice is neglected. Christian action will reflect upon the reality of God as well as the society we find ourselves in. This means that many of the traditional concerns of theology which political theology frequently eschews cannot be so easily dismissed and do in fact re-emerge as central components of the theological agenda.

A bringing together of insights from the approach of political theology and from the approach of a theology of politics suggests the following about the relation between theology and politics. It is not the terms which are used, whether these be 'political theology' or a 'theology of politics', which is important but rather what we mean to convey and understand by these terms. We should recognise the political context, mediation and function of all theology. This does not mean that all areas of theology are of equal significance for the political dimension of life, nor that the prime purpose of every area of discussion is to serve the political. Christian theology presents us with the need for a politically critical and aware theology not simply on the grounds of what we know about the sociology of knowledge, but more fundamentally on its own grounds. The doctrinal convictions which arise out of faith in the crucified Jesus of themselves demand that Christian theology be aware of the critical stance which it is obliged to take in relation to social and political reality. The need for solid doctrinal thinking is certainly recognised in the theology of politics of Barth, but also in the political theology of Moltmann. Nevertheless a theology of politics tends to safeguard the need

for hard theological thinking more readily than political theology, precisely because a theology of politics wants to understand all other reality in the light of God's revelation of himself in Christ. The danger of this approach will be that it may not always recognise the political character of this revelation, mistakenly thinking that the life of Christ and the content of Christian doctrine are apolitical and that as such when we speak of politics we are only speaking of the implications of Christian faith. The other danger may be that one shall be tempted to try to deduce an eternally valid order from the gospel, in which case one would be guilty of politicisation just as much as some political theologians doubtless are. An incarnational starting point should serve to warn us against this illusory search since the incarnation means that the truth of God and of our humanity has to be sought and embodied in terms appropriate to each situation. So long as the language of 'implications' does not blind us to the political dimensions of Jesus, it may serve to remind us that we cannot equate any particular set of political proposals with the gospel itself. However, rigorous doctrinal thinking will not be enough to indicate what should be done in any particular situation, and political theology recognises this explicitly when it includes an analysis of society. Only when the results of thorough theological thinking are combined with the results of a detailed analysis of the society to which we are seeking to make our contribution can we hope to make a relevant, helpful and Christian contribution. To talk in these terms is to call to mind the notion of middle axioms.

(b) Middle axioms

Preston tells us that Temple employed the term 'middle axioms' in 1941, having found it in the preparatory volume for the 1937 Oxford Conference on 'Church Community and State', where middle axioms are defined as:

> . . . an attempt to define the directions in which, in a particular state of society, Christian faith must express itself. They are not binding for all time, but are provisional definitions of the type of behaviour of Christians in a given period and given circumstances.

'The problem is how whatever organ of the church which does say something can avoid harmless generalities on the one side, or the endorsing of very particular and often highly disputable policies on the other' (1981b: 38-39). In an article assessing the significance of Temple 35 years after 1941, Preston defines middle axioms more precisely:

> In brief, middle axioms are an attempt to proceed from the basic ethical stance deriving from a theological or philosophical world-view to the realm of the empirical by seeing if there is a consensus among those with relevant experience of the matter under discussion (both 'experts' and 'lay' folk) as to the broad moral issues raised, and the general direction in which social change should be worked for, without getting as far as detailed policies (1981d:76).

It is in this sense that '(m)iddle axioms are arrived at by bringing alongside one another the total Christian understanding of life and an analysis of an empirical situation' (1981b:39-40). Temple (1976) begins with the doctrine of the incarnation and from this he arrives at the primary principles of God and his purpose and man and his dignity, tragedy and destiny (ch. 4), in which it is particularly important to recognise the social nature of man in community. He moves from these primary principles to the derivative principles of freedom, social fellowship and service (ch 5). Middle axioms lie between the derivative principles and detailed policies.

This approach recognises the complex and indirect relation between the Bible and ethical, moral and socio-political proposals. Moreover, we are now very much aware that there is no unitary biblical theology and that there is a plurality of political images in the Bible which can easily be suppressed (Barr, 1980a:110, 94; cf Sauter, 1981) The New Testament contains more on political responsibility than perhaps we expect, but we must not overlook the fundamental difference between then and now that we no longer live under an authoritarian power which yields no possibility to its citizens of sharing in government, and this means that we now have greater responsibilities and duties than the first Christians (Cranfield 1962:184-85; cf Hinchliff 1982:84). Another reason why we should treat the political images in the Bible with care is that there is no concept of secular power, an example of this being that it is only in the Pauline discussion of 'powers' that the problem of structures, now rightly seen to be so important, is taken up at all in the New Testament (M Berkhof,

1979:509). Reference to Jesus will be central since Jesus is the criterion and distinctive feature of Christian ethics, and his 'name is opposed to inhumanity, oppression, untruthfulness and injustice, and stands for humanity, freedom, justice, truth and love' (Kueng, 1976:547).

The employment of middle axioms involves the understanding that '(t)heology has no direct competence in the realm of worldly structures', and that '(t)he Christian . . . has no clear-cut recipes or solutions to offer to this problem, and like others must wrestle with the deciphering of the riddles of nature and of history' (von Balthasar, 1983:370, 371). It is most important that the empirical task be carried out thoroughly since it is perfectly possible to start with entirely proper theological convictions and still go disastrously astray when it comes to proposals. This is because:

> To almost any political judgement a large number of non-theological and non-moral factors are relevant. A knowledge of the facts is an obvious prerequisite; another is an understanding of how political processes work, in order to assess the likely consequences of possible courses of action (Nicholls, 1982:13).

This being the case, it is all the more cause for concern when Storkey (1979:11) comments on the fact that '(t)he present deluge of works in the social sciences is marked by a dearth of Christian contributions', and Rahner (1979d:242) confirms this when he writes that '(t)he true nature of this function of criticizing society as exercised by the officially appointed authorities as such has hardly been thought out as yet at the theological level'.

Some significant question marks can be put against this method, and it is to these that we must now turn. Hinchliff (1982:40) remarks that middle axioms are vulnerable to the charge that they are merely assertions, but this is not really a particularly strong charge since the very fact that relevant opinion, including expert opinion, is canvassed ought to ensure that any decisions are as well-considered as possible. However, the role of experts is itself a problematic one since expert advice may be in conflict with Christian convictions. This is because:

> . . . 'facts' are seen in a context of significance. The Christian therefore has to be alert to the criteria of significance which lie behind 'expert' studies and evidence. He has his own criteria drawn

> from the Christian faith, and they may lead to a different selection or weighting of facts from that of others or they may not (Preston, 1981g:153).

We accept the right and duty of the theologian to weigh such opinion but there is a danger of arbitrary and convenient selection here, which worries Homan (1981) when he expresses his suspicion of theology which claims to guide and direct the insights of sociology.

A much more serious objection to middle axioms is that they tend to have a predominantly negative character. Temple wrote that:

> The method of the Church's impact upon society at large should be twofold. The Church must announce Christian principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must then pass on to Christian citizens, acting in their own civic capacity, the task of re-shaping the existing order in closer conformity to the principles (1976:58).

Hinchliff also believes that the church should content herself largely with making negative statements and should resist pressure to 'go beyond that and propose practical alternatives' (1981:346; cf Rahner 1974d:232). In Metz we find the strongest and most exclusive stress on the negative character of the church's role as social critic. The church's cooperation with other groups should be

> . . . primarily an attitude of negative criticism and experience: the experience of threats to humanity, to freedom, justice and peace. And we should not underrate this negative experience because here lies an elementary positive power of mediation. If, indeed, we may not immediately and directly agree on the positive meaning of freedom, peace and justice, we all share a long-standing and common experience of where these things are <u>not</u> (1968a:10).

Fierro (1977:254) sees 'the total absence of positive assertions dealing with any strict knowledge of social reality or with the conditions surrounding its possible alteration' as a feature of political theology in general.

There is a sense in which these authors are quite correct, namely,

that the church does have a duty to draw attention to situations in which the human project is being frustrated, threatened or denied, and that it is often the case that whilst we can do this we are far from certain as to how we should positively assist and develop the human project. However, it is interesting that these authors have not been able to content themselves with making negative judgements, and even in the case of Metz we have the highly suggestive reference to what he calls 'an elementary positive power of mediation'. This is surely because the protest itself assumes and is grounded upon a prior positive commitment. In order that middle axioms should play as helpful a role as possible in the furtherance of human society, it is essential that the positive commitment which Christianity has should be highlighted and should not be overtaken by merely negative criticism. It is a useful thing when the church can point out when things are going wrong, but it will always be even more helpful to society if the church has positive ideas about reconstruction to offer. As the criticism which the church makes rests ultimately upon the gospel, in which new opportunities and possibilities are offered to us for the overcoming of the negative, so such criticism must seek to reflect this priority and victory of the positive over the negative. In that case, not only will it be necessary to say what the name of Jesus is opposed to, but it will be even more important to say what his name <u>stands for</u>.

To be fair, however, it is undoubtedly a consideration of the difficulties and dangers of trying to arrive at positive proposals which causes writers such as Temple to outline a largely negative role for the church. This raises the question of how specific middle axioms ought to be. Temple (1976:95) wrote that 'it is no part of the duty of a Christian as such to draw plans of a reformed society'. It is important that the church should not seek to re-assume a kind of Constantinian role which is no longer appropriate in a politically pluralistic society. She should not go beyond her role as a pressure group and should not identify herself with any political party unreservedly. Equally she should recognise that she has no direct competence in matters of specific social and political proposals, that she must work in partnership with other bodies and frequently in dependence upon their expertise, and that when we come down to the level of specific proposals there will often be quite genuine disagreement as to what should be done. But when all this has been said, the case for being more specific should be considered. For, as Wogaman (1976:173) pointedly reminds us, 'when the church abandons the field of specificity in moral teaching it really abandons the field of moral teaching altogether'. Here it is useful to recall Bonhoeffer's belief that

the risk undertaken by the church when she utters God's command in concrete proposals can 'only be ventured in full acknowledgement of its potential blasphemy and error, but it can be ventured on the basis of the promise of the forgiveness of sins' (Munsinger, 1978:170). One of the intentions of employing middle axioms is that the church should be saved from making utterance about only vague and ineffective general principles. Temple himself wrote a highly specific Appendix to his Christianity and Social Order.

The question of whether or not the church should seek to make specific proposals in the social and political realm is very much tied up with the problem of pluralism and conflict in the church. 'The truth is that people become members of the church . . . for such a wide variety of reasons that even a local congregation is simply not the kind of organization, sociologically speaking, which is capable of political action' (Hinchliff, 1981: 344, cf Gill, 1981). This brings to the fore a question which we have been begging so far, namely, who is the church? Temple may well have written an Appendix which includes several quite specific recommendations (eg with respect to education, employment, labour and capital), but he himself suggested that the church should avoid adopting particular policies as 'a matter of justice, for even though a large majority of Christians hold a particular view, the dissentient minority may well be equally loyal to Christ and equally entitled to be recognized as loyal members of His Church' (1976:41). This is an important point; we must not allow sections of the church to assign to themselves 'the Christian view' on some matter when no such thing exists because of genuine and sincere differences within the church. It might appear at first sight that it would be better simply to accept the pluralism which characterises the church's views on social, political and economic matters as being inevitable and irreducible. However, we should at least stop to ask about the price we may be paying for too ready an acceptance of this situation. Davis (1980:64-65) complains of a situation in which 'the Christian people accept a political pluralism within their Christian communities of a kind that effectively neutralizes any political significance the Christian faith might have'. Lash points out that:

> . . . in circumstances in which disagreement and conflict have hardened to the point at which Christians find it necessary to acknowledge that the notion of a 'common tradition' has become, in practice, meaningless, simply to

> accept this fact would be to have surrendered hope (1981:291).

To fail to make every effort possible to overcome political pluralism within Christianity may well be to blunt the cutting edge of the gospel, and to give up the hope which that gospel is supposed to bring to politics. Davis writes of the need to develop:

> . . . a broadly based, pluralistic, democratically functioning and critically conscious public opinion within the Church, through which Christians generally may develop a consensus in regard to political policy and action. In the nature of the case there will always be differences, necessitating compromise and mutual tolerance, but it is not too much to suppose that a public opinion formed among Christians in a discussion free from domination and constraint would reach sufficient agreement on key issues for effective participation in emancipatory political policy and action (1980:74).

Perhaps the recent publication of the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (Faith in the City) demonstrates that it is possible for the church to speak on contemporary issues and make policy recommendations which are specific enough to generate serious political debate.

Reaching this effective level of agreement in the church will require two tasks. The first is to strive for the best empirical analysis possible in order to gain a maximum degree of agreement at this level. The second is to discover resources within the Christian faith itself which encourage and help us to overcome conflict. The Christian belief in reconciliation ought to lead us to hope that it will be 'possible for one Christian community to explain to another why it takes the position it is actually taking and to account for it in terms of the gospel' (Davies, 1976:32). Interestingly, Hinchliff (1982:142) has expressed his conviction that the bond of love in the church ought to facilitate discussion of any issue, and that political convictions should not be stronger than those Christian convictions which we hold in common. At the very least it ought to be possible to list the questions upon which people disagree, and to clarify some of the issues in this contentious ground, and this in itself may allow us to reach a greater level of agreement.

Despite the problems which attend the notion of middle axioms, Preston's assessment of Temple that '(w)e need to develop more thoroughly and consistently in our time what he was trying to do in his' (1981:341) seems to be essentially correct. The middle axiom method in social ethics provides the best opportunity of arriving at the substantial degree of agreement which will be necessary before the church can speak and act with one mind and heart. We have seen that this becomes more difficult the more specific we try to be, and that there is likely to be more than one response to any given problem. The church should welcome this pluralism insofar as it reflects a determination not to settle for facile unanimity in a complicated world, and should seek to reject it insofar as it represents a failure to wrestle adequately with the gospel or the empirical data. In particular, the church must try to make sure that such pluralism does not neutralise the political significance of the Christian faith, and see to it rather that such pluralism be the genuinely sincere way in which Christianity incarnates itself socially and politically in a variety of ways in different situations.

There are three senses in which we might talk of the church being involved in politics. The first is the many different ways in which each individual Christian carries out his or her duties as a member of a family or community, as a citizen and as a worker. Here we must recall Temple's teaching that 'the task of the Church in face of social problems is to make good Christian men and women' because it is through their daily lives that 90% of the church's work is done (1976:39,40; cf Rahner, 1974d:245). 'It follows that the Church's relation with politics cannot be deduced by exegesis of its pronouncements but only from a consideration of what its members do' (Willmer, 1975:316). The second is the way in which groups of Christians may be able to get together and commit themselves to specific projects. These groups will generally be much smaller than, and not representative of, the church as a whole, although it is highly desirable that as many of the congregation as possible be involved in groups like this because this is a very effective way of being involved in the community and builds bonds between people which are so important for the life of the church. Naturally, one would hope that the different groups would retain, foster and value a sense of belonging in the church together and this should be done in sharing the eucharist especially. The third is when the church as one is able to make detailed proposals about what should be done. The church will not simply act as a kind of pressure group, but rather as a series of pressure groups held together by their common commitment to Christ. Sometimes it will be appropriate that these groups

remain church groups, but at other times it will be better for these groups or individuals to commit themselves to working for their objectives through being involved with already existing agencies. Thus a highly diverse range of experience, both inside and outside the church, both individual and corporate, both expert and lay, will enter the life of the church and will be the creative source of the church's political thinking and action. A special 'think tank' should be set up in each local congregation, parish or diocese, as well as a national forum for the discussion of such matters. By engaging the reactions and comments of the rest of the Christian community, and through continued exposure to and involvement in the problems of society, it may be possible to arrive over time at specific proposals which the local, and perhaps even the national, Christian community will be able to support. The church will not seek to usurp the role of the government as the chief political decision making body. In the light of the secularisation of politics '(w)e cannot seriously demand of the Church . . . that she should feel herself to be the subject most directly responsible for the task of modern humanity in relation to the world' (Rahner, 1976a:311). Nor will she seek to usurp the role of the state in providing for social needs, but she will seek to influence the direction of government and the shape of society, and she will be able to meet needs not currently met by statutory bodies.

(c) The shape of the society which Christian hope leads us to work for

The Christian hope is grounded upon God's commitment to and promise of a truly human life for all. If it is true that this is what God desires for us and is presently working to achieve, then we must ask ourselves what kind of society, both globally and nationally, enables all its members to live fully human lives. To have arrived at this point in the discussion is very important, since 'a political community in the full sense comes into existence when men engage in civilized debate concerning the ends of life and of society' (Davis, 1980:170). The problems of British society are minor in comparison with the life and death dramas of the Third World, but it is British society which I know best and where I live and work, and so I want to give an example of how I see the Christian hope translating itself into specific political commitments and objectives by outlining specific targets for contemporary Britain.

It may be that we are living in a opportune time since the emergence of the Social Democratic-Liberal Alliance has provoked a considerable amount of discussion about our political life. Shirley Williams (1981:209)

even claims that '(t)he old politics is dying. The battle to decide what the new politics will be like is just beginning. It is possible, just possible, that it will be a politics for people'. If as Christians we are committed to enabling as many people as possible to develop as much human maturity and enjoy as much human fulfilment as possible, then we ought to be working towards the following. We begin with the elimination of poverty. Widespread poverty in British society, estimated by some experts at approaching 10%, is increasingly threatening the unity and fabric of British society, as a highly respected chairman of the former Supplementary Benefits Commission and the present Anglican Bishop of Liverpool have both warned (Donnison, 1982:232; Sheppard, 1984). Poverty is a sin against people because it prevents them from being able to share fully in human life, its activities and relationships; it has a stultifying effect upon human life and often consigns people to living on the edge of society in, to make matters worse, the most appalling housing conditions. This shows us how social problems are often clustered together and compound each other, and so effective action has to operate on a number of fronts at once. Poverty is the first target for action because it is so widespread and ensnaring and is a basic attack upon human rights and dignity. It is a matter of acute concern for the church that it involves young children so often. It has often been said that a society is to be judged according to how it treats its weakest and most vulnerable members, and this is a point of view with which the Christian may readily agree in the light of Jesus' teaching as recorded in Matthew 25.31-46. A society which tolerates the widespread experience of poverty amongst children is therefore under the judgement of God.

The tax system could easily be used to redistribute income within society in a more just fashion if it was progressively geared. This is desirable in itself since we cannot hold the equal value and dignity of all men and women and yet reward them in such diverse fashions that we offer fundamentally different opportunities to them. This is not an argument for strict equality of income necessarily, but it is an argument for greatly reducing the differentials which currently exist. The elimination of poverty from British society is perfectly possible and in this connection it is most interesting that Donnison should state in the conclusion to his The Politics of Poverty:

> Some of the steps I have called for will cost a lot of money. I have shown at various points in this book where much of this money could be found. The remainder is a modest sum in

> comparison with the funds transferred during the last two years by tax reductions and cuts in social service expenditure. The present government has proved that it is perfectly feasible to transfer resources on a scale that would put an end to most kinds of poverty (1982:230).

If we are thinking of the vulnerable people in society, then we shall have to recognise God's special concern not simply for the poor and for children, but also for the sick in body and in mind, the elderly, the social outcasts and the morally corrupt or feckless, to take a few examples. Our concern for all men and women will mean that we shall want the best care and attention to be given to these individuals and their families so that they may one day be able to participate as fully and responsibly as possible in society. It can never be justified from a Christian point of view that we should turn our backs on such or write them off as being unworthy of our efforts. The kind of work which is required here should be provided by the state and at public expense, and there are several reasons for this. In the first place, it is doubtful whether such services would be provided by private enterprise. It is well known that private medical care is parasitic upon public provision. Second, we take it as axiomatic that the kind of service here ought to be available as a matter of universal right quite independently of ability to pay. Third, if we are seeking a genuinely caring and responsible society, then we ought to encourage that society to take responsibility for its disadvantaged members, and this is achieved better through a universal commitment to human welfare for others by means of tax-financed public expenditure than through more isolated acts of charity.

We are not all born equal and to make matters worse society sometimes functions to reinforce the disadvantages which some people begin life with. We shall have to make a deliberate effort to discriminate positively in their favour, and only in this way will it be possible for them to stand on equal terms (or as near to) with the rest of society. Redistributing income in favour of the poor would be one example of this but there are also many more. In the UK we have accepted the need for legislation to ensure that men and women of all races are treated equally, particularly in the field of employment, and there can be no doubt that this has been done primarily to protect the black community. There is also the concept of positive discrimination towards particularly deprived areas. These are important beginnings but much work remains. One area of concern in which opportunities are not yet genuinely equal is that of sexual equality.

There can be no question that the world is run for the most part by males and that there is a great deal of unjustified male prejudice about women. We need to ensure that women are not barred from holding positions of responsibility simply because of their sex and we need to create conditions and facilities which allow women to be both mothers and workers. This will doubtless involve fathers in becoming much more involved in caring for their children and taking more of their share of child-minding functions. It can be hoped that this will lead not only to a fairer deal for women and children, but also to men discovering previously suppressed facets of their character. We have to think of women as full human beings and not as objects of sexual and familial convenience.

When we say that Christian hope leads us to seek such changes to help those who are disadvantaged in various ways we must ask ourselves how the church itself treats such people. The church must be a credible sign to the world that such changes in human relationships really can take place. The begining of the world's healing ought to be visible in her own life as a sign of hope. As one example of the difficulties which the church may easily find herself in here we may think of the refusal of some denominations to ordain women. How can the church claim to speak for a new understanding between the sexes when what can only appear as an irrational prejudice to those outside remains as a central part of her life? It is time the church addressed that question. It could well be that our message of reconciliation and new life would be more credible if instead of asking the world to confess its sins before the church, as the situation must often appear to be, the church was seen to ask the world to forgive her for her sins against it from time to time.

It will be difficult to get change along some of these lines since they involve the acceptance of sometimes quite new ways of thinking about life. Novelty is usually experienced as a threat and this means that people often prefer to stay with the familiarity of the old and do not give a fair hearing to the challenge of the new. Besides this general difficulty, there is also the problem that those who profit from the injustices of the present will not readily yield the fruits of their iniquity. This means that there will be conflict and the church will have to take sides. We need to change people's attitudes and thinking if we are to change society. This is clear in the case of sexual equality, but it is also becoming increasingly obvious that we need to develop new attitudes to work and leisure. It may be that we need to think more and more of job-sharing if we are to ensure that all have the opportunity to work. New technology may seem to threaten employment but it also offers some very positive gains

by removing mundane and boring work and offering greater leisure time. We must guard against the creation of a society divided between the wealthy who have work and the poor who do not. If we are to spread the amount of work available over the population who want to work we shall have to persuade people not only of the advantages of job-sharing but also of the moral imperative to do so, and we must find ways of allowing people to job-share and still meet their financial commitments such as mortgages and the like. Convincing people of the moral imperative of such changes will not be easy since so much of our present economic system rests on the motivation of personal individual benefit. People will not readily give up some of their present standard of living so that others less fortunate may get a better deal out of society. For the Christian who seeks a genuinely caring and human society it is necessary to be extremely critical of this selfish individualism and its conflictual and divisive consequences. A just and caring society requires us to think of being in cooperation with each other and serving each other rather than of being in competition with each other. It is difficult for some people to think of their job as meaningful service and here we must take full advantage of the opportunities of new technology for removing such mindless activities. The change in pattern of work which this points to means that we must plan ahead and train people for the new and more satisfying occupations.

In the search for a more just and caring society we should also consider the questions of ownership, participation and control. Giving people a genuine share in the ownership and running of their employment will increase their sense of belonging and commitment, will lead to a more equitable distribution of the gains of the business, and will hopefully overcome the wasteful conflicts which so often cripple our industry in the institutionalised antagonism between workers and employers. It is well worth experimenting with new forms of economic organisation to see if it is possible to arrive at a situation less burdened with the inequalities, conflicts and inefficiencies of the present. Ways of extending participation and control must also be sought on the political scene. We need to overcome people's sense of powerlessness over their circumstances (e.g. with respect to housing planning) and their consequent cynicism about politics by devising new ways of taking their views seriously and new machinery for acting upon their own local hopes, fears and wishes. We need to give power back to the people so that their sense of alienation and frustration is replaced by a sense that who they are and what they want is taken seriously, respected and acted upon wherever humanly possible. The church must stimulate people to think about the fundamental questions of

what kind of society we wish to live in, and of what is most important about being human. If the church can do this she will perform a most valuable task since as Donnison has observed 'nothing happens until large enough questions - questions which cannot be satisfactorily answered within the confines of present arrangements and assumptions - have been convincingly and publicly posed' (1982:219). The church will not simply start the debate but will also have her own particular contribution to make.

It is easy to see why many Christian writers feel a certain antagonism to capitalism and a certain sympathy for socialism. Capitalism is based upon a competitive individualism which very frequently divides people against each other and reinforces inequalities because those who already own most of the wealth and capital are those who are in a position to accumulate more and prevent others from doing so. Temple (1976:94) saw that the divisive class-war can only be remedied by 'the acquisition by Labour of a share in the control of industry' but perhaps he did not sufficiently appreciate that this must mean economic control if it is to be effective in bringing about a sense of common commitment and a more just distribution of the gains of such common endeavour. What is missing from capitalism is any essential requirement that the pursuit of profit must not be carried out without due regard to questions of social justice. By comparison socialism has the great advantage of being explicitly concerned with the creation of a just community. It therefore involves a direct challenge to the goal of capitalism, and it embodies the possibility of a quite different economic basis for society. While there may be a broad suspicion of capitalism and a broad approval of socialism we cannot leave matters there. It is probably true that there are no real examples in the world of either pure capitalism or pure socialism; what we find is a continuous spectrum of many different forms and combinations of socio-economic and political organisation. Some countries such as the USA approximate to the capitalist model and some such as the Eastern bloc countries approximate to the socialist model. Many countries occupy the middle ground and this form of organisation is often referred to as a mixed economy. Britain is a mixed economy with a liberal democratic political heritage. We must try to ask as open-mindedly as possible how far different ideological options are able to fulfil the Christian vision of society and where they come into conflict with this. Moreover, since we must begin where we are, we must ask what it is feasible to achieve in Britain with all the constraints which historical development and accident have laid upon us.

Wogaman looks at five major ideological options, these being Marxism

(ch 4), laissez faire capitalism (ch 5), social market capitalism (ch 6), democratic socialism (ch 7) and economic conservationism (ch 8). For the Christian the first two cannot be serious possibilities but the other three are and as yet we cannot exclude any of them:

> I do not believe we yet know enough about the diverse possible economic futures to exclude any of the three ideological forms. My own inclination, over the long run, is more toward democratic socialism than toward the other two. I would at least agree with John Bennett that we live at a time when the socialist question needs to be pressed (1977:158).

This is in keeping with his earlier assessment that 'the rudiments of an economic ideology which is more or less compatible with Christian faith . . would, I believe, be a form of democratic socialism' (1976:212). If socialism is to be a viable option for the democratic West it must be able to convince us that this form of economic organisation can be combined with a genuinely free and open politics. Therefore, if we are to move to an increasingly socialist situation in Britain, then it must also be made clear that this can only be done in conjunction with attempts to increase the deomcratic character of government, and must in no way threaten the democratic freedoms enshrined in our way of life which we rightly cherish. In Britain this must mean parliamentary socialism elected through some form of proportional representation and with a better balance between local and national government than we presently have. No model can hope to be permanently valid and there can be no uncritical identification of any particular system with the kingdom of God. All we may hope is that at a particular time and place, one particular solution may be a more adequate embodiment of God's purpose for mankind than all the others on offer. Democratic socialism does not have a monopoly holding of the desire for a just and caring society. Those who prefer socialism ought to be able to recognise that these things can be sincerely desired by those who are convinced that they do not want to be socialists. Although the present Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher seems largely complacent about the plight of the poor and the unemployed, it ought not to be overlooked that some senior Conservative figures, such as Edward Heath, Francis Pym (1984) and Ian Gilmour, have made it quite clear that the present government is betraying some of the finest points of what they consider to be the true Tory tradition. In particular they believe that

this tradition demands of government a compassionate response to the problems of those who are losing out on society's benefits, and a responsibility to foster national unity through the creation of fair and equal opportunities for all. The possible weakness of the position represented by Heath and others is that their proposals tend to ameliorate the worst aspects of the market economy without dealing with the fundamental sources of those problems. Thus Wogaman (1977:160) writes:

> Social market capitalism seeks to have the best of both worlds, the private and the public. Democratic socialism considers it an illusion to suppose that public power can coexist with private corporate power without the latter dominating the former.

Fundamental economic reforms should be our long-term aim. The main point of socialism is that:

> . . . economic power is formally responsible to the whole of society, through the state, and not simply to those who hold it as private wealth. Accordingly, economic decisions are much more likely to be made in such a way as directly to benefit everybody and not simply those who own the instruments of production (Wogaman, 1976:210).

But our present situation is that we live in a mixed economy and we must begin here. Preston rightly criticises Agenda for Prophets (Ambler and Haslam, 1980) for not 'coming to grips with the problems of an advanced industrial society, nor of its relations with the Third World, nor of how we move from where we are nor, apart from the vaguest indication, where we move to' (1981h:87). It is no good having lofty ideals in our heads if we cannot translate these into feasible and attainable programmes. We must not forget Butler's description of politics as 'the art of the possible'. 'We must always act on the presumption that there are some possibilities - but not unlimited possibilities - in every human situation' (Wogaman, 1976:148). None of us can claim in advance that any particular model will definitely work, and the ideological debate must continue in deed and in action. We should hold as our long-term goal the creation of a just and happy human community. This must involve the reconstruction of our economic and political life so that all people may be able to identify with the system and feel that they have a reasonable share in it. We must

encourage people to think of themselves as being involved in a shared venture working together and sharing the rewards of their joint efforts. We must find ways of sharing the ownership of the various employment situations amongst all those working there, and ways of allowing genuine debate about the ends and means of society amongst as many people as possible. We want local communities of people finding a new way of living together and working together. For this to happen there will have to be significant changes in the way many people currently think. We are not entitled in Britain to engage in extra-political means of change. We must accept that we have to persuade others that our way of life is a better one. Clearly, it will take a very, very long time indeed before we reach the ideal situation and it may well never be reached in this history. We must begin where we are and that is with a mixed economy with a significant public sector and welfare provisions. Changing attitudes is a long and slow process perhaps stretching over several generations but that is the task which we must embark upon. Perhaps over a long time the force of the democratic socialist case would be felt by increasingly large numbers and as ever greater levels of common human endeavour were established it would become increasingly possible to implement the ultimate goals of a democratic socialist vision of society. It is difficult to believe that any future politico-economic state of Britain will not involve some social market arrangement. Democratic change must respect the plurality of views which exists about our economic life. The moral strength of a more corporate and egalitarian vision hopefully will increase the <u>social</u> side of the social market mixture without eliminating the features of the market which best promote a vigorous yet humane economy. We are still left with the question about whether any of this will be possible. Most of the tasks attached to the agenda for the immediate future can be achieved if we work intelligently to get enough public support for them. There have been some encouraging opinion polls in support of the view that we can persuade people of the need for self-sacrifice to achieve a better deal for all. An example of this is the willingness of many people when asked if they would be prepared to pay more income tax in order to have better social services (see Clifford, 1984:84). Another example of a shift to greater public responsibility which has been recognised by people to be beneficial for all has been the provision of public transport at low fares and increased provision of public amenities even though this adds to the rates bill. So there are examples which should give us hope, and we have not mentioned experiments in job-sharing, industrial democracy, sharing of non-essential domestic items and the like. If we were ever to admit that we did believe

that real progress along these lines in society was beyond our reach, this would involve more than just a collapse of human hope but really and truly a collapse of faith in the Christian God. The instances of hope are ambiguous signs of his saving presence.

We have been arguing that the Christian vision leads us to look beyond selfish individualism to a truly caring and human society. We want to create a situation of full human fellowship and mutual service. Moltmann (1981:198) has written:

> The three divine Persons have everything in common, except for their personal characteristics. So the Trinity corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession.

We must take up the challenge presented by this very interesting thought and explore some of the possible links between the doctrine of the Trinity and the kind of society we have been arguing in favour of.

(d) Trinitarian politics?

Let us begin with a highly provocative passage from Timothy Ware's The Orthodox Church:

> Our social programme, said the Russian thinker Fedorov, is the dogma of the Trinity. Orthodoxy believes most passionately that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not a piece of 'high theology' reserved for the professional scholar, but something that has a living, practical importance for every Christian. Man, so the Bible teaches, is made in the image of God, and to Christians God means the Trinity: thus it is only in the light of the dogma of the Trinity that man can understand who he is and what God intends him to be. Our private lives, our personal relations, and all our plans of forming a Christian society depend upon a right theology of the Trinity (1980:216).

This is a bold claim and although it may well represent a necessary condition of a proper social theology it cannot be viewed as a sufficient condition. A valid social theology can only emerge out of the mixture of sound theology and accurate empirical analysis. The theologians who wish to relate the triune being of God to the social being of man make use, not surprisingly, of the distinctive Eastern stress on the social understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity rather than the Western psychological model. The trinitarian doctrine attempts to explain the 'social character' of God. God means community, because he is community in his essence (Lochman, 1975:179). Clinck (1979:66) argues that '(t)he Trinity - as an epitome of differentiated unity, of diverse yet cooperative sovereignty - seems to furnish a uniquely Christian insight into questions of social and political organization'.

We shall now discuss some of the more important suggestions which have been made concerning the Trinity as a model for human society. Clinck (1979:59) informs us that 'Gregory of Nazianus formulated, at least implicitly, the question of the relation of the Trinity to politics . . . He sees in the qualified monotheism of trinitarianism a concept of God which sustains unity without requiring uniformity'. Jenkins (1967:117) develops this when he says 'the reality to which the symbol of the Trinity points is highly relevant to that balance of the individual, the relational and the communal in which the fulfilment of personalness may be looked for'. A third way in which the Trinity is said to direct politics is to argue that it provides the model for the classless society (Osthathios, 1979). Leech (1981:7) exemplifies this approach when he suggests that humanity is called to share in the society and equality of the relations of the divine life itself. Braine (1975:188) has challenged this way of thinking with the following words:

> It is not that God is a society of three equal personalities, and that human society as a society of more numerous members must be egalitarian and anti-authoritarian in imitation of this. The Trinity is not a society of three separate beings in this sense, nor are men equal in this sense.

Parker provides a fourth way of connecting the Trinity to politics, and does so in a very interesting fashion which we have not found elsewhere, when he makes use of the notion of perichoresis as follows:

> The trinitarian life of God as a perichoresis of the 'persons' embraces the struggle for community as well as the

> achievement of communion. This insight, grounded in the economy, has been neglected whenever monarchial thinking has frozen the hypostases and their relations into eternal moments of divine Being over against creatures.

From which it follows that 'the political meaning of the doctrine of the trinity comes as an invitation to share in the struggle for that form of human community which expresses the truth symbolized in Christian faith in God, the blessed Trinity' (1980:179, 182).

The reference to monarchial thinking recalls the work which has been done on the relation between monotheism and different political models. Moltmann argues that the doctrine of the Trinity puts an end to political monotheism by denying the parallel 'one God - one emperor', and by showing that what is to be enacted on earth in correspondence with the divine rule is not power but love, freedom, fellowship and service.

> The Christian doctrine of the Trinity unites God, the almighty Father, with Jesus the Son, whom he delivered up and whom the Romans crucified, and with the life-giving Spirit, who creates the new heaven and the new earth. It is impossible to form the figure of the omnipotent, universal monarch, who is reflected in earthly rulers, out of the unity of this Father, this Son and this Spirit (1981:197).

This means that the only almighty power we may speak of in God is the power of his love. The triune God points to the necessity of thinking of freedom in terms of that love which creates community, rather than lordship which destroys community through domination. 'The doctrine of the Trinity . . . must for its part point towards a community of men and women without supremacy and without subjection' (1981:216, 192). Moltmann would appear to have confused the deficient way in which power often has been thought of with the supposition that power necessarily carries this meaning. The fact that power has often meant domination should not lead us to suppose that power is necessarily of this kind. Sykes (1982:209, cf 1984:297) does not find Moltmann's argument at this point persuasive since '(i)t appears that it rests on a largely unexamined (though very fashionable) concept of power, which treats all power as dominative'. Moltmann (1981:192) is surely wrong when he thinks that '(t)he idea of the almighty ruler of the universe everywhere requires abject servitude, because it points to complete dependency in all spheres of life'. It is this which causes him to oppose power and love in God:

> As the Father of Jesus Christ, he is almighty because he exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death. But what he is is not almighty power; what he is is love. It is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else (1981:197).

The word 'power' conveys no single meaning and can take on several senses, and this is part of the problem with Moltmann's discussion and with talk about the 'powerlessness' of the cross. What the Christian perceives in Jesus, and it is this which Moltmann should say, is that God's power is exercised in the name of love. It is therefore no naked or unqualified 'almighty power' which creates the world, endures the cross and is victorious in the resurrection, but as the power of God it is almighty. If one avoids the importation of negative ideas into the term 'almighty power' from the start, then it ought to be possible to talk of the almighty power of God in a way which is consistent with his love and this would be a properly Christian confession of 'God the Father almighty'.

The view that a classless society of equals may be traced back to the classless society of equality of the divine life itself in the Trinity must also be examined critically. We have already seen Braine's response to this that God is not 'a society of three equal personalities'. Moltmann (1981: 243) would want to argue that as Father, Son and Spirit they are 'three persons' very much along the lines of 'three equal personalities' and that one must stress this in the direction of tritheism to overcome the tendency towards modalistic ways of thinking about the Trinity. The perichoretic unity of the Trinity is analogous to the desired inter-relatedness of society, and although Moltmann states that '(t)he Holy Spirit is not a person in the same, identical sense as the Son; and neither of them is a person in the same, identical sense as the Father' (1981:189) this uniqueness of the three divine persons could also be thought of as analogous to the uniqueness of human persons. Thus Braine's response may not be as damning as it first appears since the argument from the equal society of the triune godhead to the equal society of the political model created in the image of God rests on a broad analogy rather than an exact correspondence and does not require us to think of God as 'three separate beings' as he states. We should note, however, that the notion of human social equality is far from clear when we come to ask about its concrete embodiment. The notion of an intra-trinitarian divine equality is even less clear and this means that it is difficult to see how the theme of intra-trinitarian equality can provide a helpful model for an egalitarian politics.

Critical questions must also be put to Parker's treatment of perichoresis in which he wishes to see both 'the struggle for community as well as the achievement of communion' and thus an invitation to share in the struggle for a truly human community. Much struggling and striving will be entailed in the achievement of a truly human community since many undeniably sinful elements stand in the way of human progress, and in addition to this there can be quite legitimate disagreements amongst those of genuinely good will. However, it is difficult to see that a struggle for community takes place in the life of God as the three divine persons seek community among themselves. If this does take place in God's own triune life then Parker should provide us with instruction as to what he means and in particular he should tell us what it is that the Father, Son and Spirit find in each other which is an obstacle to their perfect unity and which they must therefore struggle against. Outside of the incarnation I cannot see how one can talk about the struggle for community being a struggle between the three divine persons and probably even then we should need to be very careful. The truth in Parker's argument which applies to both the human community and the triune God is that social life is a dynamic process which is constantly in need of re-affirmation (cf Tracy, 1981:443). The fundamental difference between what this means for God and what it means for the human community is presumably that whilst the Father, Son and Spirit quite naturally and spontaneously renew and deepen their 'social' life together the human community must constantly overcome obstacles to its development which have become deeply embedded in the fabric of individual and social life.

In these discussions of the Trinity as a model for human society and as a criticism of political power we may detect insights of varying quality which derive from the two sources of Christian doctrine and social and political theory. The danger here is that some political categories may be read back into the doctrine of God in an inappropriate fashion. This would be to open such an argument to the accusation that the doctrine of God is being abused since it is functioning as a post factum justification of a political commitment already entered into on other grounds. Talking about the classless trinitarian God exhibits this tendency. However, it would be a mistake to think that one must view the political models as only deriving from the doctrine of God and not also shaping it. To be able to talk about God at all we must use the various models, metaphors and analogies which are to hand. The fundamental theological metaphor which Christian theology must operate with is that provided by the gospel story itself, namely, that of the Father and Son. This immediately demands of us that we use the

language of human relationships, and that demand becomes all the more urgent when Christology leads us to the doctrine of the Trinity. Models of human community must therefore be sought which illuminate and communicate the reality of the triune God who makes himself known through the incarnation. Some of the available models will be rejected as inappropriate because, for example, they confuse the reality of God with the reality of man and obscure the difference, the notion of perichoretic struggle falling into this category. Some truth exists in this model, but this must be given expression through a better model, such as that of a living community of perfect, self-giving love. The introduction of the adjective 'perfect' here serves to show how the human models have to be stretched when applied to the divine. It is therefore too harsh a charge to make against those theologians who wish to understand the doctrine of the Trinity in social terms closely akin to social and political models of what is considered to be the ideal human society that they are driving the theological horse with the political cart since the relationship between the two is more complex and dialectical than this criticism imagines. We must have models both for our understanding of God and for the political task to which we are called. It is to be hoped that since we desire a community after the image of God it will prove that models which illuminate the political task will also shed light on our understanding of God and vice versa.

To conclude we may make three points concerning the Trinity and politics. The doctrine of the Trinity is no intellectual puzzle which distracts us from the real concerns of a needy world but in fact a massive assertion of the importance of involvement. It does not allow us to remain uninvolved because it points us to the reality of the world's suffering and evil, in the midst of which Christ himself lived and died to bring it to an end. If we believe in the Trinity it means that we find God in Jesus and that the path of discipleship means sharing his passion for and commitment to the world. This is the fundamental significance of the doctrine of God as Trinity for politics. Second, the search for community is not only made necessary by the divine commitment to the world but also takes its shape from the triune community of love which God is seen to be and to extend to the world in and through Christ. The fact that there is inter-relatedness and community within God must suggest something about the nature of the human community to which our politics is to be devoted. The social model of the Trinity must not be made to bear too much weight here because at best there is only an analogy between divine and human community. The

mystery of the divine community escapes precise understanding and prevents us from elaborating detailed notions such as 'equality' from it. Nevertheless, we can say that the doctrine of the Trinity points to an essentially relational notion of the person who finds fulfilment in loving the other (Zizioulas, 1985:46, 106; cf Juengel, 1976b:32, 63). It is easier to speak of this than of the notion of equality because we see the relational nature of the divine existence embodied in the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Christian forms of politics will seek to cultivate the partnership, sacrifice and responsibility which this understanding of person seems to demand. Third, the doctrine of the Trinity tells us that such community can only be established through much self-giving. Self-giving is not only the end but also the means of God's kingdom. A trinitarian politics must be prepared for the costliness of the cross.

iii The cross as the model for the actions of Christian hope

Trinitarian political practice recognises in the cross the paradigmatic instance of God's action. Christians who engage in politics will therefore reflect upon the sense in which the cross is the model for actions which are prompted by Christian hope. We shall develop this by considering the problems posed by the use of power and violence, and by indicating the centrality of atonement and forgiveness in politics.

(a) Power, violence and the cross

Although we shall discuss power and violence together it is important that power is not identical with violence. The crucial distinction is that 'while power and force are neutral things, to be used for good or evil, violence can never be neutral: by definition it is an evil thing' (Kee, 1977:136). Power and force are not intrinsically evil but violence, even when we may feel constrained to use it because the alternatives are greater evils, remains evil. It is easy to see how power may be necessary in order to promote human welfare, much less clear how violence can possibly do the same. By violence we mean attacks upon individuals or groups which result in serious injury or death. Our definition of violence includes both the violence of those who wish to maintain injustice and of those who wish to banish it. We shall be concerned with the possibility of the latter for the Christian and the role of the Christian community when it does take

place. 'Violence' can also refer to the damage or destruction of property and institutions which perpetuate injustice. Our concern shall be limited to the exercise of violence against persons because it is this which gives rise to the most acute difficulties for the Christian who seeks a new brotherhood and sisterhood amongst human beings estranged by sin and its socio-economic and political embodiment.

Pope John Paul II gave an eloquent and powerful refutation of violence during his visit to Ireland in 1979 when he said:

> Violence is evil. Violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems. Violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity (Morrow, 1984:8).

In speaking these words the Pope was standing firmly within the teaching of Christianity that there is a prima facie case against the use of violence. Wogaman (1976:46) believes that the presumption against war was so strong that the just war theory 'could almost be termed a crypto-pacifist solution'. However some would argue that the theory has been applied with insufficient rigour and with the permission of the violence used to maintain the status quo while at the same time forbidding the violence directed at removing this frequently unjust state of affairs.

This shows the importance of the fact that if we ask those who suffer from injustice and oppression to refrain from violence we must also make every effort to remove the injustice and oppression under which they suffer. As articulated by St Thomas Aquinas the theory of the just war was an attempt to set out the requirements of love (Preston, 1981c:65, 66). If this is the case then the theory must never be used to turn a blind eye to some forms of violence whilst condemning others since violence is always against love.

The just war theory placed a presumption against war by setting strict conditions which must operate before war can be engaged in. The first condition: 'War must be undertaken and waged exclusively by the leaders of the State' (Baker, 1982:94) would seem to rule out the possibility of civil war against the present rulers, and this is in fact the particular use of violence which concerns us here. This shows that the theory has certain inbuilt cultural and historical limitations which prevent it, at least in its classical expression, from being able to conceive of the possibility of a just civil war even though this does not seem to be a totally impossible idea and could in theory meet some of, and perhaps all of, the other

requirements. The possibility of a just civil war must therefore be considered in the modern context. In so doing we should not forget that civil war is inevitably much more ambiguous and difficult to justify since there is no commonly agreed threat posed by an external enemy. Also there may still be the possibility of political action within a nation where this no longer exists as a means of resolving a problem between nations. Even in the latter case we may feel that there is always some possibility of resolving international disputes by non-military means if we are prepared to go on searching for this.

The possibility of alternatives to violent action is a weighty consideration in the just war tradition since: '(r)ecourse to war must be a last resort' (Baker, 1982:94). Violence against our fellow human beings is an evil and therefore it must not be contemplated unless there is nothing else which one can do. It is precisely at this point that some Christian theologians believe that Christian faith forbids violence because there is always something else which can be done. Ellul (1970:168-75) denies that the Christian ever gets to the point where violence is the last resort since prayer is always the last resort. If this was the essence of Ellul's position it would be open to the charge that it asks too much of those who suffer and does too little for them, but it is less open to this criticism when we see that Ellul's main objection to violence stems from another important legacy of just war theory: 'Those engaging in war must have a reasonable hope of success' which should be taken together with 'The evil and damage which the war entails must be judged to be proportionate to the injury it is designed to avert or the injustice which occasions it' (Baker, 1982:95, 96). Ellul objects to the use of violence because 'violence simply does no good and . . . it always contributes to the further career of evil in the world' (Wogaman, 1976:122). The dehumanising tool of violence cannot be used to fashion a more human future, and insofar as we do use it we give up the hope of a more human future. However good our intentions may be, violence plunges us irretrievably into a vicious circle. For Ellul this is in direct confrontation with the Christian gospel which tells us that God's way in the world is the way of the cross. This is the meaning of resurrection as Willmer (1979a:137) points out:

> The cross was a limit intrinsic to the work of Jesus. Since cross, however, was answered by resurrection, cross may not be taken as a sign of the worthlessness and futility of the way that led to the cross. Resurrection is rather the endorsement of that way as God's.

It is in this sense that we must choose between violence and the resurrection according to Ellul.

Our discussion has enabled us to bring together elements of the just war theory and a much more explicitly Christian reflection upon the problem of violence. It is now being argued that we should reject violence as a means of change because this is what Jesus himself did and his way is God's way of making peace in the world. The christological pacifist position, as we shall call it, argues that Jesus taught us not only what peace is but also how to achieve it (Cullen, 1975:542). Hengel argues that political theology has overlooked the radical example of Jesus and has thereby become mere political theory or 'action'. Jesus' non-violent stance is relevant and applicable today because his situation was quite similar:

> The injustice and suffering in Palestine two thousand years ago was certainly no less than the suffering in our world today. The revolutionary prescriptions of our time for the overcoming of such injustice and suffering are likewise not always so very different from those proposed then. The idea that the present-day situation has become intolerable, so that revolutionary violence has become justified, even necessary, was widespread then as now - and it was not the most wicked who were proclaiming this idea. Those who justify violence today do not see that they are starting a vicious circle from which they can scarcely escape.

Jesus saves us from the viciousness of violence by demanding love of enemies and it is only if we follow his example that we can hope to construct a more human future (1973:64, 57-58, 49; cf 1977a)

Yoder, perhaps the most influential recent writer in this area, makes similar points but the treatment is more developed. He sets out to test the hypothesis 'that the ministry and the claims of Jesus are best understood as presenting to men not the avoidance of political options, but one particular social-political-ethical option'. The argument is centred upon the cross since '(t)he cross is not a detour or a hurdle on the way to the kingdom, nor is it even the way to the kingdom; it is the kingdom come'. The cross is the one instance in which Jesus, according to the New Testament, is consistently and universally our example, and the attitude of the New Testament church towards the powers of this world is fundamentally determined by 'the thought of participation in the suffering of Christ'. Jesus subjected himself to government and we are forbidden ever to take the

life of an enemy because the gospel of his life and death is the possibility of a true witness of self-giving love which is prepared to be crucified rather than force its way upon the world. Only in this way can the truth and the future which God has prepared for the world be maintained.

> Between the absolute agape which lets itself be crucified, and effectiveness (which it is assumed will usually need to be violent), the resurrection forbids us to choose, for in the light of resurrection crucified agape is not folly . . . and weakness . . . but the wisdom and power of God (1972:23, 61, 97, 213, 231, 114).

Yoder does not consider a concern for history to be unimportant, illegitimate or irrelevant, since for Christian faith God is the God of history. Rather the argument is that there are some costs which we must not pay for the sake of being effective in the political-historical arena. Jesus will not win at any price or at all costs. By his self-giving life and death he embodies something which is more important than being successful in political or historical terms. He embodies the reality of the divine self-giving love which is directly opposed to all forms of violence and triumph by force. This is why Yoder says of Jesus:

> The choice that he made in rejecting the crown and accepting the cross was the commitment to such a degree of faithfulness to the character of divine love that he was willing for its sake to sacrifice 'effectiveness'.

Jesus gives up any attempt to control or force his way upon history and leaves everything in the hands of God. The giving-over of everything to God was utterly genuine; it is not that by giving himself up to death Jesus sought to guarantee his eventual triumph. 'The relationship between the obedience of God's people and the triumph of God's cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection' if Jesus 'is to be looked at as a mover of history and as the standard by which Christians must learn how they are to look at the moving of history'. This is the sense in which the cross is not even the way to the kingdom (1972:238, 240, 238, 239, 61).

Yoder is not arguing that all our objectives can be achieved by non-violent means. He recognises quite clearly that if we are not prepared

to force the issue and play the game of power politics, in all probability accompanied by violence, then we must be prepared to see some of our legitimate aims unfulfilled. 'It is rather that our readiness to renounce our legitimate ends whenever they cannot be attained by legitimate means itself constitutes our participation in the triumphant suffering of the Lamb'. Suffering does not guarantee our triumph but in its conformity to Christ it does share in his triumph:

> Suffering is not a tool to make people come around, nor a good in itself. But the kind of faithfulness that is willing to accept evident defeat rather than complicity with evil is, by virtue of its conformity with what happens to God when he works among men, aligned with the ultimate triumph of the Lamb.

So Yoder concludes: 'The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe' (1972:244, 245, 250).

Yoder articulates in some detail what many Christian theologians feel almost instinctively about the incompatibility of Christian faith with violent means of change and the seeking of power and success at any cost. The cross means that we must place a very grave question mark against any suggestion that violence can be used in the name of a more human future. Christian faith is suspicious of any such claim because it recognises that this is in direct opposition to the paradigmatic action of God in the world in Christ. The way of Christ in the world is one of self-giving, of weakness, of receiving, absorbing, drawing-out, and thereby putting an end to the evil, hostility and violence of the world. In Jesus it is not further violence but self-sacrificing love which overcomes the sin of the world, and introduces to the world a new possibility of being which leaves behind the destructiveness of violence. In short, violence is the very opposite of the kind of action which faith expects to be able to offer the hope of salvation. It is not just that the cross points us in this direction but rather that the cross is of a piece with what is observably true about the destructiveness of attempts to bring change by violence. Violence is always a threat to a more human future and we must never forget this. This means that there is a strong presumption against violence. However, it is difficult to believe that pacifism is always the kind of action required of us since in some cases it is just possible that violence may succeed in bringing about a permanent change for the better. Moreover it can be argued that when pacifism is seen as the necessary implication of

the cross the particular circumstances of Jesus's death are being insufficiently attended to and a particular historical act, albeit of fundamental importance for Christian faith, is in danger of being made into an abstract universal principle.

The way in which Jesus brought in God's kingdom by embracing death need not mean that it is never permissible to use violence to change a situation. Certainly he is the paradigm of Christian action in the world but we must surely recognise the possibility that:

> It does not follow from the fact that our Lord was opposed to the Zealots that He would necessarily have discountenanced on principle rebellion in all conceivable circumstances. It is easy enough to think of very good reasons for disapproving of the Zealots, quite apart from any disapproval of rebellion on principle (Cranfield, 1962:188).

In particular Cranfield has in mind the low probability of a successful revolt against the Romans. It is also true that Jesus was aware of the self-defeating character of violence as when he said that 'all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Matthew, 26.52, RSV) and gave himself up to violence as the way in which he must seal the New Covenant (cf Gethsemane, Last Supper). It is difficult to think of Jesus himself ever using violence against his fellow men and women. To this extent the statement by Osthathios (1980:51) that:

> If the cross-bearing of the Christians will not bring about a just classless society by the force of Christian love, God may permit the sickle and the hammer to do so as he chose Cyrus the heathen to fulfil his purpose once. In any case the Nazarene is bound to win ultimately.

must be regarded as deeply unsatisfactory and dangerously naive. It is difficult indeed to see how the corpse of anyone smashed by a hammer or cut to pieces by a sickle can allow us to say that the crucified has won, or that this sort of human mayhem has been made permissible by the cross. What sort of redemption can we hope for in this? It certainly does not redeem those whose remains will lie at our feet, and having done such things the human future will not be obviously safe in our hands. The cross <u>is</u> opposed to violence and makes it always fundamentally questionable. Even when we feel violence is to be preferred as the lesser of two evils

the cross is opposed to it. In this case the cross does not absolutely forbid violence but it reminds us of its questionable nature, of the guilt incurred, of the cost in terms of the loss of life and the loss of feeling for life, and of the fact that it is love which secures the human future we seek.

Jesus is opposed to violence but if this is true it is also the case that it is difficult to imagine that he would prolong human suffering when it seems possible to end this. This may well involve some initial violence but it is difficult to deny a strong compulsion to act in this way if there is a strong possibility of success. Miguez-Bonino (1973:473-74) has this in mind when he warns of some uses of 'basic theological categories like reconciliation, forgiveness or peace, which in the long run are more costly in human lives and suffering and less respectful of the human person'. Even in the writings of those who are strongly committed to pacifism we find the admission that some violence is inevitable and that the Christian's responsibility is to keep this to a minimum and control it (Hengel 1973:66; Douglass, 1973:271-72).

Wogaman makes two very important criticisms of Yoder which are highly relevant to the position which we are arguing for, namely, a strong presumption against violence whilst keeping open the possibility that it may be the lesser of two evils and therefore the course of action we should choose. Yoder would deny the 'therefore' of the last sentence. Wogaman is sharply critical of Yoder's argument:

> . . . that the attempt to deal with dehumanizing conditions must be subordinated to the exigencies of a positive Christian witness in <u>every</u> case where there is an apparent conflict. In no case can conditions be so bad, so frustrating of God's loving intention, as to justify negative actions. <u>Nothing</u> on this earth is worth defending by the sword.

In the final analysis this position is essentially sectarian and is too prepared to ask the victims of history to continue to pay the price for the 'purity' of such a Christian witness:

> I question whether the perfectionists have weighed sufficiently the concrete life and possibility of fulfilment of those who would be most vulnerable to any abandonment by Christians of responsibility for the government of human

> events. It is not enough simply to commend the vulnerable multitudes of human society to God's provident care in some future time. God expects more of us than that.

Wogaman believes that Yoder is trying to evade the difficulty of having to choose between two evils but this is impossible since this is often the place where we find ourselves. Commenting further, he tells us:

> . . . it must be said that in so far as moral perfectionism really is his position, the result is bound to entail withdrawal from responsibility from those problems which can apparently only be dealt with through use of those less-than-perfect means. Referring the problem of results or outcomes to God is only verbally a solution to the dilemma (1976:127, 130, 191).

Wogaman's second criticism is that Yoder is 'too sharply sceptical about the possibilities of positive Christian witness in the face of negative actions . . . (and) too greatly doubt(s) the Christian's ability to do negative things in a redemptive way' (1976:129). At the heart of the Christian gospel stands the conviction that good may come out of evil. This is quite misunderstood if we take it to allow us the possibility of doing evil lightly. But it is surely relevant to those situations in which those who are contemplating the use of violence often find themselves. The use of violence entails an act of love for some while being prepared to deny life to others. This involves a sin of commission. Failure to act by using violence may well involve the sin of omission. In <u>both</u> cases there are those who are sinned against perhaps even to the point of death. We cannot escape from this basic dilemma and Yoder's attempt to do so fails. More seriously, we may suspect that Yoder's position in fact sometimes leads to the choosing of the <u>greater</u> of two evils. Choosing between two evils will often be terribly difficult and at best a precarious exercise but we may take some hope from the thought that since Christian morality is concerned precisely with the formation of character (Hinchliff, 1982:202) it may well be that the Christian is better prepared for such decisions than most. Cranfield's words pose a grave warning to those who would adopt Yoder's stance:

> Often the only choice open to the Christian in a particular situation will be a choice between evils; but he will realise

> that it is not a matter of indifference whether the greatest possible, or the least possible, evil comes to pass, and that to help to bring about the greatest evil by refusing, out of a mistaken perfectionism, to choose the least is surely to be guilty of dereliction of duty (1962:190).

Yoder's account seems to require the renouncing of all tenure of political power and not just of violence, the giving up of every 'handle' on history (1972:239). This is most unfortunate because the willingness to exercise political power, and to run its attendant risks, is an essential prerequisite for anyone or any group who wishes to change society. Moltmann is wise to place before us the constant threat that power may be dominating and Richardson (1973:93) has argued that the desire to dominate others is the meaning of original sin but he is wrong to reject the notion of power per se. There is no virtue in being powerless per se; to be powerless may often be a wretched and hopeless situation. In order to improve the world we need to have the power as well as the knowledge to do so. Power here means the political influence and the economic resources (and perhaps also the police and military strength) necessary for change. Rahner (1966e:402-09) provides a much more helpful and realistic perspective on power when he tells us that its exercise is not irrelevant to salvation but is on the contrary either a process of salvation or perdition, and should be carried out with faith and love. To exercise power with faith and love ought to involve minimally a recognition that power is exercised on behalf of others, in conflict with others as well as in partnership, in foolishness as well as in wisdom, and so in repeated need of forgiveness. To this very important Christian perception of politics we shall return in the next section. Tillich (1978c:385) made the interesting comment that:

> The depreciation of power in most pacifist pronouncements is unbiblical as well as unrealistic. Power is the eternal possibility of resisting non-being. God and the Kingdom of God 'exercise' this power eternally. But in the divine life - of which the divine kingdom is the creative self-manifestation - the ambiguities of power, empire and control are conquered by unambiguous life.

Power is ambiguous but the alternative to its use is to invite chaos and destruction because we have failed to take responsibility for our corporate

life and our lack of participation has made it easier for politics as it is practised to exclude important truths about our corporate life. Power and conflict are perennial features of the human condition and any theological reflection on politics must enable us to live more effectively with these as the necessary mechanisms for the regulation of societal life. A willingness to use power will be all the more important if we are to save revolutionary violence from destroying its own hopes for a better human future.

Lehmann's The Transfiguration of Politics is very much concerned with the theological significance of revolution and the need to save the revolution from denying its own initial hopes for humanity. He believes that it is only Jesus Christ who can save the revolution from itself:

> The pertinence of Jesus Christ to the question of revolution is that he stands at the juncture of revolutionary freedom and fate. His presence in the human story transforms revolutions from harbingers of futility, violence and death into signs of transfiguration in the power of a saving story (1975:236).

This should not be turned into some facile optimism by confusing a difficult possibility with an achieved fact. If Christians are to take part in revolutionary struggle the prospects for saving the revolution from lapsing into an inhuman fate must be carefully evaluated and nurtured. This is a variation on the requirement of just war theory that those engaging in war must be able to entertain a reasonable hope of success. Our argument has been that since there is a prima facie conflict between the use of violence and the construction of a more human future the Christian will be fundamentally suspicious of any claim that such a future can be secured through the use of revolutionary violence. However, it may be that in a few cases such action is the lesser of two evils and is likely to bring about a lasting improvement. If we can indicate the circumstances in which this possibility could conceivably exist, we shall thereby be indicating both something of what it takes to save the revolution and something of how it might be that Jesus Christ saves revolution from its likely inhuman end.

Our suggestion is that Jesus may save the revolution if we keep before us his death and its significance particularly in the following four senses. First, it is true that for the Christian power must be exercised with love. Jesus died as an expression of love for all men and women and

so that all might enter fully into God's purposes of life and love. This means that Christian faith will reject from the outset any revolutionary activity which seeks only to acquire dominating power for some over others rather than a situation in which all parties can live together in justice and share more widely in love. This will be the first requirement of any proposed revolution, namely, its universal intent. In this way Jesus keeps open the possibility of revolutionary freedom by reminding us that he died for all and that there can be no truly human programme unless it promises life for all. This is precisely where revolution is so difficult to entertain because even if after the revolution it intends life for all, during the revolution it promises certain death for some. This must be faced for we have here a terrible moral dilemma, and as soon as we begin to deny this we shall endanger the human end we seek. We shall endanger this end whenever we deny that killing another person is evil or when we try to argue that killing is not opposed to love. In these ways we shall lose our feeling for the human in the other person and when we have lost that the human future will look precarious indeed in our hands. Thus our second point is that a revolution is more likely to succeed if it admits the guilt it must bear over its necessary victims. Davies advises us that:

> To kill someone is never good, but it may be the right course of action depending upon the circumstances. Christians may have to accept the guilt of killing in the name of forgiveness and only in this way will they be preserved from moral indifferentism.

The distinction between 'right' and 'good' here is an important one and we prefer Davies' use of it to Wogaman's argument that:

> It is <u>conceivably</u> an act of moral goodness, and therefore no sin, to choose a lesser evil in a situation where choice is in fact limited to actions or inactions which can only result (one way or the other) in <u>some</u> evil (1976:119).

In the case of killing another person we see that we may be compelled to choose the lesser evil on moral grounds but we should hesitate to say this was an act of moral goodness, far less no sin. Ricoeur seems more in touch with reality when he suggests that often the Christian politician is faced with the problem of limiting his culpability rather than maintaining his innocence (Stewart, 1972:63). Bonhoeffer faced the problem of killing in

his involvement in the plot to kill Hitler. It would have been all too easy for him to have rationalised his guilt in this but he refused to do so, recognising that to fail to admit this guilt would deny the truth and cut himself off from Christ. He expressed the matter in this way:

> If any man tries to escape guilt in responsibility he detaches himself from the ultimate reality of human existence, and what is more he cuts himself off from the redeeming mystery of Christ's bearing guilt without sin and he has no share in the divine justification which lies upon this event.

And again:

> Before other men the man of free responsibility is justified by necessity; before himself he is acquitted by his conscience; but before God he hopes only for mercy (1955:210, 216).

The cross reminds us that we are all guilty and that it is a particular sin to put someone to death because they stand in the way of our plans. A revolution which admits this is more likely to succeed because it will not have lost its feeling for the human, and will not have closed its doors to the forgiveness which all human revolution is in need of if it is to give us a more human future. A revolution which forgets its victims is not to be trusted and McCann (1981:19) rightly draws attention to the importance of Metz's insistence that we require 'a Christian soteriology lest the victors in this "emancipatory" process become forgetful of the price paid by history's victims'.

The third way in which Jesus may save the revolution is that in the light of God's love for all we must seek to achieve a political situation in which all can participate and have a share in shaping how things are. This means that we shall only entertain the hope that a revolution may give us a better human future if those advocating it can show that they are preparing for democracy and that they have the plans and the ability to bring this about. We must be quite convinced that the use of force is a purely temporary expedient and will be replaced at the earliest opportunity by the politics of consent.

Such a politics will have to recognise that there will be conflict and much need of reconciliation and forgiveness in the aftermath of a

revolutionary upheaval. Once again we shall not be encouraged to trust ourselves to a revolution which does not seem to understand this, does not prepare people for this, and have plans for institutional mechanisms to facilitate this. This then is a fourth way in which remembrance of Jesus' death may serve to save the revolution because in him we see the necessity and the possibility of reconciliation. The Christian community will have an important role to play here in demonstrating that such a practice of reconciliation and forgiveness is possible. In this context the celebration of the eucharist will be a focal point of hope for the new society. 'The Christian eucharist may seal the reconciliation, articulate the joy, and keep the values of justice henceforth clear'. It would not be surprising if the formerly oppressed do not show forgiveness to their former oppressors, and Wainwright insists that we have no right to expect them to forgive, but he is not being unrealistically hopeful when he observes that 'where forgiveness is granted, we have a sure sign of the salvific presence and action of God - at the deepest level - among the forgiving' (1980:431, 430).

The need for the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation and for appropriate mechanisms for this to have political reality brings us back firmly to politics. Violence can never be anything other than a temporary departure from the norm of politics, and it is no substitute for the practice of politics. Politics and violence are basically opposed to each other, so much so that Richardson (1973:110) could state that 'violent action against established authority is the abandoning of politics altogether'. Christian faith remains fundamentally opposed to violent means of change. It is most unlikely that this will serve the human cause. What we have seen in this discussion is that in a few very exceptional cases violence may be permissible because it is the lesser evil and we have sought to show how best to protect the long-term welfare of men and women when this happens. Christians therefore have a responsibility to make sure that the practice of politics does not become sterile and so invite change through non-democratic, non-political means. But this means that Christians must be prepared for power.

(b) Atonement, forgiveness and politics

There is an inescapable political dimension to the death of Jesus. There is also an inescapably theological dimension to politics. It is one of the most important tasks of political theology to draw our attention to this (Davis, 1980:133). The cross remains at the heart of politics because

all political practice needs forgiveness and involves an element of vicariousness:

> Christian engagement in political life is possible only on the basis of a convinced understanding of the atonement and what it says about the necessity of suffering and failure - of passion, in effect (Hinchliff, 1982:184).

The practice of politics is very demanding and even our best efforts are likely to go wrong or to fail at least some people. Those who work in politics are often faced with seemingly intractable problems which impress upon us our limited grasp of the issues and the poverty of our imaginative capacity to find solutions. It is unfortunately often true that:

> Today's well-intentioned decisions are tomorrow's burdens. Today's heroes are tomorrow's villains. There is no guarantee that Christians will be exempt from such pain in their experience of political action (Gladwin, 1979:188)

Politics cannot escape such finitude. A politics which can serve a better human future will have to be prepared for the self-sacrifice of what may well turn out to be a largely thankless and uphill task. Politics frequently encounters hostility, misunderstanding, ridicule, cynicism and apathy. Politics may fail human society but its continued practice is essential to its preservation. To give up politics is to give up all hope of an open society. It is difficult to see how there can be any prospect of a better human future unless some are prepared for this sort of involvement with difficult and entangled issues, conflicting loyalties and problems which do not seem to permit of any solution which could be welcomed by all. The practice of politics is both necessary and impossible. This is why it is carried out vicariously. Its costliness is made necessary because of our collective failure to live with each other yet it is not borne by us all. Whenever politics fails there is a human cost. Often that cost will not be paid by the politicians whose lives may well be far removed from the difficulties of ordinary people. Perhaps more often than not it is the vulnerable and powerless who pay the price for political failure. It is such people and not the politicians who suffer vicariously. However, this fact should not prevent us from seeing that the politicians themselves are also the victims whose preparedness for costly involvement is also a vicarious participation in the sin and finitude of the world.

Our political salvation depends partly upon the quality of the solutions which their suffering produces.

The fact that there is always a human cost in the failures of politics means that its continued practice depends upon the presence of forgiveness. We are given to thinking that this is essentially a private notion applicable only to relationships between individuals. Yet we need only think of Northern Ireland or Beirut to see how easily politics is emasculated, and with this how deeply the hope of a better future disappears, when there is no place for a forgiveness which takes place between communities and not simply individuals. Forgiveness is a central category for the interpretation of politics (Willmer, 1979b, c, d). Morrow (1984:12) concludes that forgiveness is absolutely necessary in both personal and political life with these telling words:

> The psychological case for forgiveness is overwhelmingly persuasive. Not to forgive is to be imprisoned by the past, by old grievances that do not permit life to proceed with new business . . . Forgiveness frees the forgiver . . . from someone else's nightmare.

In a world which often prefers revenge '(f)orgiveness does not look like a tool for survival . . . But that is what it is'. Politics breaks down where forgiveness is withheld and it is no longer possible to search for the reconciliation which would permit us to live more humanly with each other. A politics of forgiveness is therefore the ultimate realism which makes political morality possible (Hinchliff, 1982:190). We must seek to practise a politics which recognises the need for such forgiveness between communities and can give tangible and credible expression to this. Such a politics will preserve an essential truth of our commmon life and will be painfully conscious that politics always fails some people. This is why, as West (1975:180) says, '(s)ome way must be found to institutionalize the understanding that we live by God's grace also in the political process'.

Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates that Christian hope must take politics seriously. The foundational events of Christian hope show God's irrevocable commitment to the human project which is also the subject of politics, and which cannot be sustained without politics. Cross and

resurrection invite us to engage politics hopefully because in Jesus God's grace has entered the world of politics and brought forth new life and reconciliation.

Although Christians will engage politics hopefully they should be aware of the difficulties involved. There is no simple way from Christian convictions to political proposals. This is partly because Christians will frequently lack the empirical expertise required, but it is also because Christians themselves will disagree about policies even when they are in full possession of the relevant facts. We have argued that the church must seek to be as specific as possible if she is to make an effective political contribution. This is why we have tried to make middle axioms more specific and to be critical of the mere acceptance of pluralism in the church over politics. To achieve specificity the church will have to acknowledge and then seek to deal with conflicts over political choices. The fact that she is a community constituted by God's reconciling love leads us to believe that this is possible. The recent publication of the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, Faith in the City, is proof that it is possible to make specific proposals which command widespread support across the churches. Christians will continue to disagree about many political issues. Such pluralism should produce a variety of incarnations of Christian hope where no single strategy can command our agreement. There must be no withdrawal from politics; if the church(es) cannot speak and act as one then faith should be practised politically in a variety of ways by groups of Christians who remain open to the possibility that they may be wrong. To abandon politics on the ground of pluralism is to abandon Christian hope.

Politics seems to require qualities which the Christian recognises as being central to the faith: struggle, self-sacrifice, commitment, reconciliation, forgiveness, hope. Cross and politics belong together. The cross is the model for the actions of Christian hope. We have discussed two senses in whch this is important for the practice of politics. First, the cross places a major presumption against the abandonment of politics in favour of violent means of directing the human project. This does not mean that the human can never be promoted in this way, and in some cases the way of violent change may be the lesser of two evils. Even in this case, however, the cross will have an important role to play in saving the genuine human hopes of the revolution. Second, politics as much as inter-personal life depends upon forgiveness. Where this is absent the terrible consequences are all too clearly seen. Christian hope can prevent the death of politics by insisting on the importance and the possibility of

forgiveness and reconciliation. The church can also point the way to the positive creation of human society by demonstrating in her own life that true community is being achieved.

Closing Thoughts

At this point it is appropriate to summarise our main findings about hope, but also to stress the necessarily incomplete nature of our achievement and to indicate some of the more important issues which require further study. The task of theology is never finished and in truth '(e)verything remains a beginning, an attempt, an approximation' (von Balthasar, 1983:187). We have sought to undertake a piece of systematic theology but by this we do not mean the creation of a complete watertight system. Rather we have tried to think coherently about a range of issues in terms of the Christian understanding of God, formed as it is by the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. This means that although a certain coherence does emerge as the logic of the argument takes us from one area to another, it remains true that the very centre of all of this thinking constantly resists any neat or very satisfactory exposition. In some ways this should not surprise us since the centre of the discussion concerns the mystery of God disclosed in Jesus' passion and resurrection. Cross and resurrection lie at the heart of the argument about hope, yet precisely here we feel most sharply the barriers to human comprehension. We understand enough to be able to form a rational and coherent argument about hope, but we must not forget that there can be no 'conclusion' to the theology of Christian hope in the sense that the intellectual work has been done. It is much more that the subject of hope presents itself to us as a continually recurring intellectual and practical challenge, and one which, if we wish to think about it in a self-consciously Christian fashion, sends us back time and time again to the three days which stand at the heart of faith's understanding of God. It challenges us to discover what those events which stretch from the defeat, at least in some senses, of Good Friday over the silence of Holy Saturday and into the mysterious victory of Easter Sunday can mean and have to say in the light of, and to, our situation.

At the end of each chapter we put forward the main conclusions concerning that particular investigation. We do not intend to repeat the sometimes detailed and specific points outlined there. Rather, in a more general way, we can indicate what seem to be our main findings about Christian hope. These are as follows:

1 Christian hope is hope in God because of Jesus Christ. Concentrated upon Jesus' death and resurrection, it is grounded in history and must be understood in terms of a christological definition of God.

Crucifixion-resurrection is the ground, logic and pattern of Christian hope. Its fundamental influence is evident in our other points.

2 Because Christian hope is grounded in crucifixion and resurrection it exhibits great strength and resourcefulness. It knows how great are the obstacles to hope, and how deeply hope can collapse under their pressure, yet it believes it is rational to act on the basis that there is always hope since God does not abandon us.

3 In looking to Jesus as the model for the practice of hope, faith understands that the cost of keeping hope alive is sometimes great. Hope requires a preparedness for sacrifice. The Easter faith does not leave the cross behind but rather makes the cross central to its understanding of how hope enters the world, by dealing in a costly way with the strong forces which threaten a better human future. This raises a disturbing question; if faith today seems to carry little cost, is it failing to bring hope to those very places and people where it is needed most, and where costs are likely to be incurred?

4 Hope can only be practised and sustained in the context of community, and for Christian hope this means primarily the community of the local church, serving the local community. The church ought to sustain hope by being the place where Jesus' death and resurrection are remembered and celebrated, and it ought to be a credible sign of hope in the world by embodying the possibility of a better human future. The importance of the sacraments, especially the eucharist, is evident, but if the eucharist is to fulfil its potential here its celebration must be related much more explicitly to the task of constructing a better human future than is, in our opinion, the norm.

5 Hope is not disappointed. This does <u>not</u> mean that there are no disappointments; clearly there are and these will continue. However, the Christian experience is one of crucifixion and resurrection. There is no resurrection without crucifixion and failure is part of the costly exploration of hope's possibilities. But there is also no crucifixion without resurrection. Some gain is always possible, and even in the worst situations, resurrection makes its way into our lives. This is a foretaste of God's ultimate victory. God's purposes for all creation will be fulfilled given enough time and a large enough context.

6 God's purposes have at their very centre the creation of love. It is love which comes to reign upon Jesus' cross as the final truth about God, ourselves and the world. Love is the ground, the way and the end of Christian hope.

7 Therefore we must direct our energies now to the possibilities of love and the encouragement of truly personal ways of relating to each other. This can be done in various ways, but in the final analysis faith cannot and should not avoid involvement in politics. The simple fact is that no effective action towards a better human future can ignore the political choices which are made and which constrain the possibilities of people's lives, If the church is to be serious about hope, she must also be serious about politics.

8 Hope is not certainty but confidence. It does not <u>know</u> the future, but it does <u>trust</u> in God. The task and commitment of hope is possible in this way, and can lead to a growing conviction that such trust is not misplaced.

There are two main sets of questions which the thesis prompts as requiring further work. The first set concerns the relationship between hope and contemporary society. We have argued that it is one of the most important contributions of a Christian understanding of hope that it grounds hope in the saving activity of God. It is ironic, however, that such an eminently existential doctrine as that of atonement can easily lose its moorings in our present need for salvation. It is not difficult to see some of the things from which people might need to be saved, eg unemployment, death, nuclear destruction, the breakdown of relationships. In this way the doctrines of hope and salvation can be brought together. But it still seems to us that more work needs to be done on what salvation could mean today. This will not mean the loss of the traditionally very important ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation, but it is likely to have to pay more attention to the social, political and economic meaning of these in addition to their more immediate application to inter-personal relationships. Closely related to this is the question of the relationship between church and society. The considerable stimulus given to this discussion by the publication of <u>Faith in the City</u> must be used to full advantage. There is a need for a creative dialogue between social science and theology so that useful, detailed, practical strategies of hope can evolve. It seems to us that it would be possible to write a book on Christian Faith and

Contemporary British Political Choices from the springboard of the discussion of chapter four. However, what would be required for this is a much more detailed grasp of contemporary British society and its possibilities than chapter four offers. In other words, much more work needs to be done in achieving the necessary competence in social science disciplines. Too often in systematic theology the doctrine of the church is understood in a rather abstract, idealised fashion. We need to re-think this in terms of what the church actually is, and in terms of the purposes of God for the world. Both the social conditioning and the social potential of the church must be recognised. Indeed, we may suggest that it is only when the latter is faced more squarely that the almost unique opportunity of the church, because of its presence in every community, can be realised in promoting the growth of true community.

The second set of questions concerns the fundamental relationship between hope and the doctrine of God, and in particular the trinitarian basis of the thesis. For example, the christology which undergirds the thesis needs to be made more explicit. Broadly speaking - and in some ways it is only this 'broadly' which is needed to stimulate the argument - the understanding is incarnational. It seems to us that this is inevitable if faith is convinced that its ground lies in a human death and resurrection which is also the fullest self-giving of the life of God himself. Nevertheless, there are various ways in which this broadly incarnational understanding could be cashed out. This need not be a case of trying to work out the christology in detail and then asking what this says about hope. We would be suspicious of this as being quite the wrong approach. Rather we are suggesting that the important question is: 'What sort of christology is suggested by, or perhaps even required by, the experience of hope, and the statements made about it, in the Christian community?' It seems to us that the doctrine of the Trinity is also inevitable given the experience of God in Jesus and in the Spirit. In this sense it is the most strenuous and adequate attempt to re-think God in the light of Jesus' passion and resurrection. However, the doctrine of the Trinity is no monolithic entity and trinitarian thinking varies considerably. In trying to steer a path between the equally unsatisfactory options of unitarianism and tritheism, we have tended towards a more Eastern social model of the Trinity. Here everything seems to depend on how satisfactorily one can interpret the notion of 'person'. Moltmann's theology shows how important this is since the combination of a strong pluralism, verging on tritheism, and the theme of contradiction, leads to a theoretical breakdown in his doctrine of God (cf Millbank, 1986:223). If he had worked with an

understanding of 'person' in God which did not allow such separation, as if God really was like three separable human persons, his theology of the cross could still have found place for a profound self-differentiation in God which makes suffering and death possible for him, without the theoretical undermining of the basis of hope in God's overcoming. It has been argued by some that the trinitarian model and its use of 'person' is so unsatisfactory that it ought to be abandoned. The most impressive statement of this argument was given by Lampe who believed that 'the Trinitarian model is in the end less satisfactory for the articulation of our basic Christian experience than the unifying concept of God as Spirit' (1977: 228). In the light of this it would be especially interesting to see what a full-blown systematic theology would look like if it was constructed along the lines of Lampe's model. Perhaps only then will we be in a reasonable position to see which model is the more satisfactory.

The fact that we have been brought back to such fundamental questions concerning the Christian doctrine of God confirms the central importance of hope for Christian faith and theology.

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